MARVEL MASTERWORKS

THE MIGHTY THOR

VOLUME 23

THE MIGHTY THOR Nos. 337-348
& ANNUAL No. 12
WALTER SIMONSON

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MARVEL

MARVEL MASTERWORKS

PRESENTS

VOLUME 23

COLLECTING

THE MIGHTY THOR Nos. 337-348

& ANNUAL No. 12

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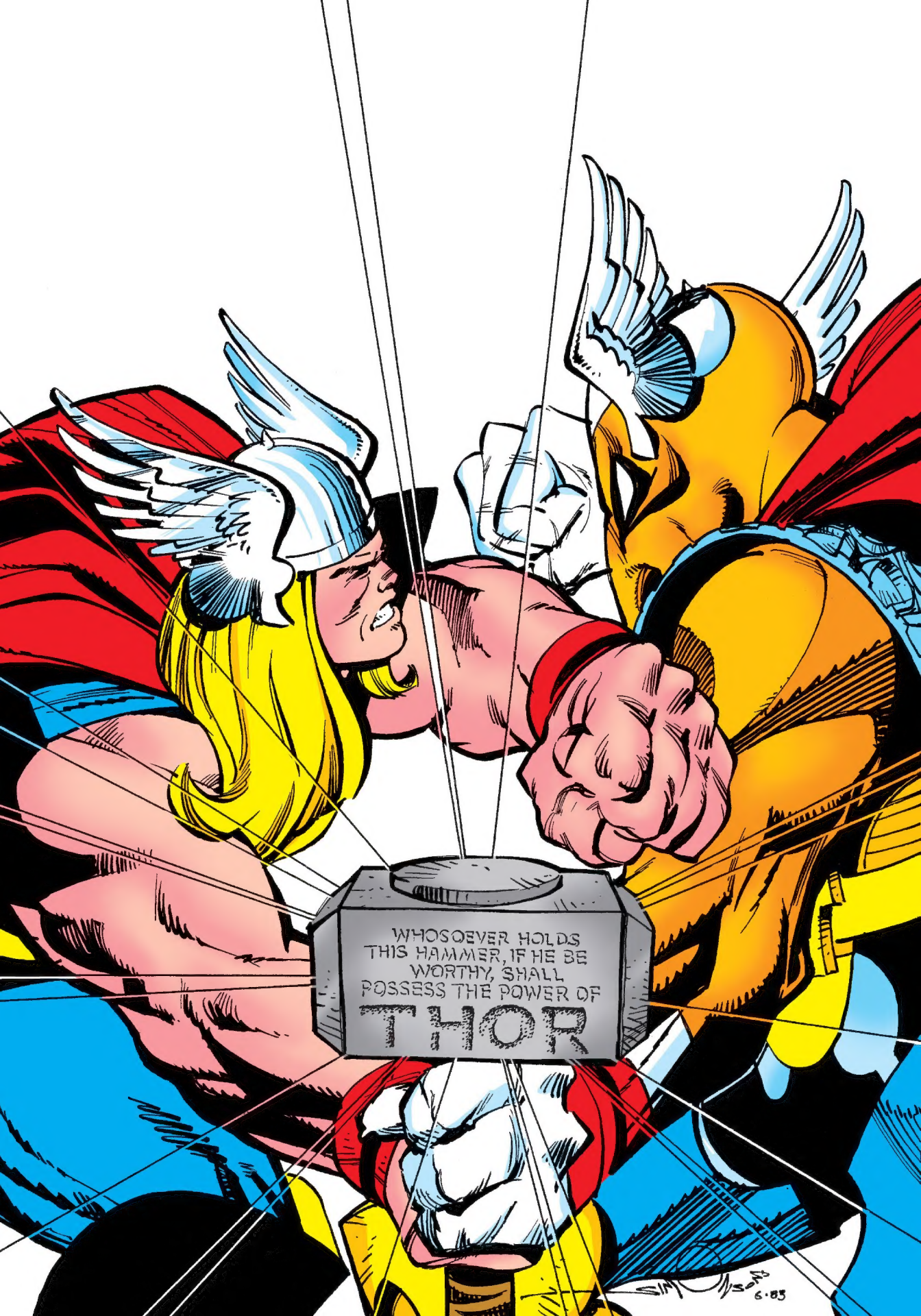
WHOSOEVER HOLDS
THIS HAMMER, IF HE BE
WORTHY, SHALL
POSSESS THE POWER OF
THOR

MARVEL MASTERWORKS
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MY JOURNEY WITH THE NORSE MYTHS... OR...IF THE ODINSWORD BE DRAWN...

BY WALTER SIMONSON

I discovered Marvel comics in the freshman dorm room of one of my friends during my first year in college. I was hanging out in Dan's room and there was a copy of *Journey Into Mystery* #113 sitting around. It featured the return of the Grey Gargoyle; Dr. Donald Blake revealing to nurse Jane Foster, the mortal woman he loved, that he was in fact, Thor; Odin's wrath at said revelation; the stripping of Thor's godly powers; the journey of a mysterious Asgardian to Earth; the fight between the Grey Gargoyle and Dr. Blake; the restoration of Thor's powers for 30 seconds to give him time to defeat the Grey Gargoyle; the execution of that frantic battle; Odin forgiving his son; and Thor putting the genie back in the bottle and telling Jane that Don Blake really isn't Thor. And I've skipped the first two and a half pages where Jack drew a battle between the Asgardians and the demon men of Jotunheim [sic] that had nothing to do with the comic's plot but made for a great opening sequence. And all of this mayhem in sixteen pages.

I'd been a fan of the Norse myths since I was very young. My parents' library had a book written by H. (Hélène) A. (Adeline) Guerber, published in 1895, titled *Myths of Northern Lands*. It was filled with stories of the gods and included illustrations of the Norse gods and heroes as well as quotes from the *Elder Edda* and sagas. In retrospect, the illustrations were interesting in that they were obviously heavily influenced by figures from Classical Greek and Roman sculpture. But as a child, I didn't care and found the stories fascinating, especially the notion that eventually, the gods and their enemies would die fighting together in a great battle.

I grew up in the Washington, D.C., suburbs of Maryland. I began reading comics by the time I was 5. I had a good friend named Jay and we read them together and traded them and kept small stacks of them in our houses that we would read over and over. But there were never any Atlas comics distributed in our neighborhood, and I never saw them or comics released under the company name they assumed in 1961, Marvel, until I left home for college. When I discovered that *Journey Into Mystery* issue in my friend's dorm room in 1965, I was delighted to find that there was a comic about the Norse god of thunder.

That summer, while I was home for vacation, I found a drug store a few miles from our house that carried Marvel comics. I bought my first issue, *Journey Into Mystery* #120, "With My Hammer in Hand…!" by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. It was the first part of a four-issue story and, after that, I was hooked. I couldn't have cared less that Marvel's Thor didn't have red hair, wasn't wearing iron gauntlets to catch his hammer, and didn't travel in a chariot pulled by goats. I just loved reading new stories about the Norse god's adventures.

Within a few months, I was buying all the Marvel comics published in those days, which meant about eleven or so titles. Quite quickly, I was up on all the continuity and for a couple of summers, there were even a pair of Thor annuals published. I collected the older back issues I could afford, and eventually, in 1967, I began concocting my own storyline involving Thor and pretty much the rest of the Marvel Universe, as it was then constituted. It was part Marvel mythology, part Norse mythology and part Simonson invention.

My idea was to do a long story. I enjoyed epics and that seemed entirely appropriate for Thor and

the Marvel Universe. I was probably influenced by the fact that I had read *The Lord of the Rings* around the same time I discovered Marvel comics and Thor. They were the two seminal events of my college career, as it happened. My ambition was to create a story that would be published in the summertime. It would start in an issue of *Thor*, run through all the other Marvel titles that same month, and a month later, climax in a new *Thor Annual*. That would give the story twelve issues with a climax in a double-sized comic, large enough to support a great battle and a conclusion.

I didn't plot out all the issues. I plotted the first issue and the conclusion. I figured that in my imaginary story the other issues would be written by their respective writers with a story for that month guided by a sentence or two about the overarching storyline, then they were on their own.

I graduated from college, took some time off and decided to go to art school. I applied and was accepted at the Rhode Island School of Design as a transfer student. I entered RISD as a sophomore, skipping freshman year. I took all the classes I needed to, but in my spare time, I had not forgotten about my Thor epic and I began to draw the conclusion. I drew it in a slightly oversized spiral bound notebook that I still have. I penciled and inked the pages, using Rapidographs, a kind of technical pen suited for drafting, and really, my first inking implements. I knew nothing of pen nibs or white out or brushes, and filled in the starry Asgardian sky with a black made of endless lines done with a No. 4 Rapidograph, drawing circles for stars and filling everything else in around them. After 30 pages or so, I decided that I wasn't happy with my inks and set the project aside to finish when I felt my inking had improved. During my junior and senior years at RISD, I began work on another comic of my own characters, *Star Slammers*, writing, penciling, lettering and inking a pulp space opera story. And in the meantime, I discovered pen nibs and white out, and my inking got better.

After I graduated from RISD, I moved to New York City to try to break into the comics industry. I was successful and began getting work regularly. I started initially as an artist. It never occurred to me to try my hand at writing professionally. However, I worked with really good writers and learned a great deal from them. Eventually, in 1980, I was offered Marvel's *Battlestar Galactica* series—to write as well as draw—and I jumped at the chance. The book folded after a few issues but nobody blamed me and I was offered other work sometimes as a writer, sometimes as an artist and sometimes both together.

Back in the day, Marvel had offices in New York City that served as business headquarters, production facilities and editorial offices. When you finished a job, you went into the office and physically turned in your pages to your editor. That meant that you got to see a variety of artwork other creators were doing, talk to everybody from freelancers to editors and assistant editors and sometimes even to business people. It was great. At some point, I ended up in the late Mark Gruenwald's office, chatting about this and that. Mark was editing *Thor* at the time and we talked about the epic I had worked on some sixteen years earlier. I didn't think anything of it; it was just one more office conversation I enjoyed. But not long after, Mark called me into his office and offered me the opportunity to write and draw *Thor*. There were several writer/artists working in mainstream comics then including Jack Kirby, Jim Starlin, Frank Miller, John Byrne and Howard Chaykin so it wasn't a unique situation by any means. However, at that time, I had only written about ten comics so I was still really new to the idea of writing my own stuff. I was surprised to be offered the book, but I was encouraged by the work my friends were producing, and I agreed to take up the challenge, especially because it was *Thor*.

My initial thought about what I might want to do with the book was easy. I wanted to tell a story that hadn't been told before, or at least as close as I could come to such a story. Back then, Thor already

had about twenty years of continuity behind him. That's a lot of stories. Eventually, I hit upon the idea of creating a new character who could pick up Thor's hammer Mjolnir. Until that point in the Marvel Universe, nobody other than Odin had done that. (Well, there was one story where Loki, juiced by the Norn Queen's magic, picked up the hammer but I chose to ignore that one as a sport of nature.)

Since no one had picked up the hammer, I felt that I needed to create a new character from the ground up worthy of Mjolnir. And so Beta Ray Bill was born. The actual story of Beta Ray Bill's creation is a tale for another time. Suffice it to say that a fair amount of thought went into his forging. I did the only four-issue story arc of my entire run on *Thor* built around his origin and introduction to the Marvel Universe, but, of course, inventing a new character was going to carry me only so far. And then I had a brainstorm. I went back and resurrected my old story from college. I already had an ending of sorts worked out for it. I just had to find a beginning, and Beta Ray Bill was it.

Back when I was reading *Thor* every month, Stan and Jack had created something called the Odinsword in the "Tales of Asgard" backup feature. The Odinsword was a giant sheathed blade in the middle of Asgard. Its only real backstory was that if the great sword was withdrawn from the scabbard, the universe would end. But there were no specifics about how that might work. And although I can't find it now, my memory is that Jack drew some sort of Eternal Flame in Asgard. And occasionally, Stan and Jack did an issue or two in which Surtur, the fire elemental from Muspelheim, appeared as the bad guy of the month. In actual Norse mythology, Surtur is one of the oldest of beings, possibly older than the gods themselves and at the end of time, he would appear at Ragnarok—the Twilight of the Gods—and help to bring about their destruction, flinging fire across the Nine Worlds and burning nearly everything. I combined all these elements—some from the comics, some from mythology, some from my own ideas—into one story, working out the details for the beginning and the end of the saga. In my best (or worst) Stan Lee voice, I called the story, "For If the Odinsword Be Drawn."

That story became the basis for the first seventeen issues of my time on *Thor* as writer/artist, starting in 1983, some sixteen years after I had created the core of the story in college. I had to do some fiddling with my original storyline. In the interval between my college plotting in the late '60s and the beginning of my writing the actual comic professionally for Marvel, the Odinsword had been destroyed in the comic's continuity. But swords are made to be forged, so I saw to it that a new sword was made.

Once I began constructing my storylines, I used the original Stan Lee/Jack Kirby run from about *Journey Into Mystery* #114 to *Thor* #139 as the prototype on which to model my own stories. I structured my run of issues episodically with an underlying thread running through them. And I took my time. I made the individual arcs two or three issues long. I created a series of subplots involving Thor's best friend, Balder the Brave, the Warriors Three and characters I invented such as Lorelei, the Enchantress' younger, cuter sister. I tried to write the individual issues with brief interjections that would foreshadow future stories in the hopes that readers involved in the current stories would be brought back by my hints of future ones.

One particular treat for me was that when I reached the climax of the story, I was able to go back to my original RISD comic and copy a number of my layouts verbatim as it were. It was a wonderfully satisfying tip of the hat to the eager fan that I had been in college, and I was quite pleased to discover something else as well.

My inking *had* improved.

One final note: I have been deliberately circumspect to a degree in discussing my original Thor story and my subsequent professional version. I suspect that most of the folks who purchase this book will already be familiar with "The Surtur Saga," but on the off chance that you are reading it for the first time with this book, I want you to experience the story for yourself.

It is my sincere wish that all you gentle readers, old and new, enjoy afresh the tale of Surtur and the adventures of Thor and his companions.

New York
2024

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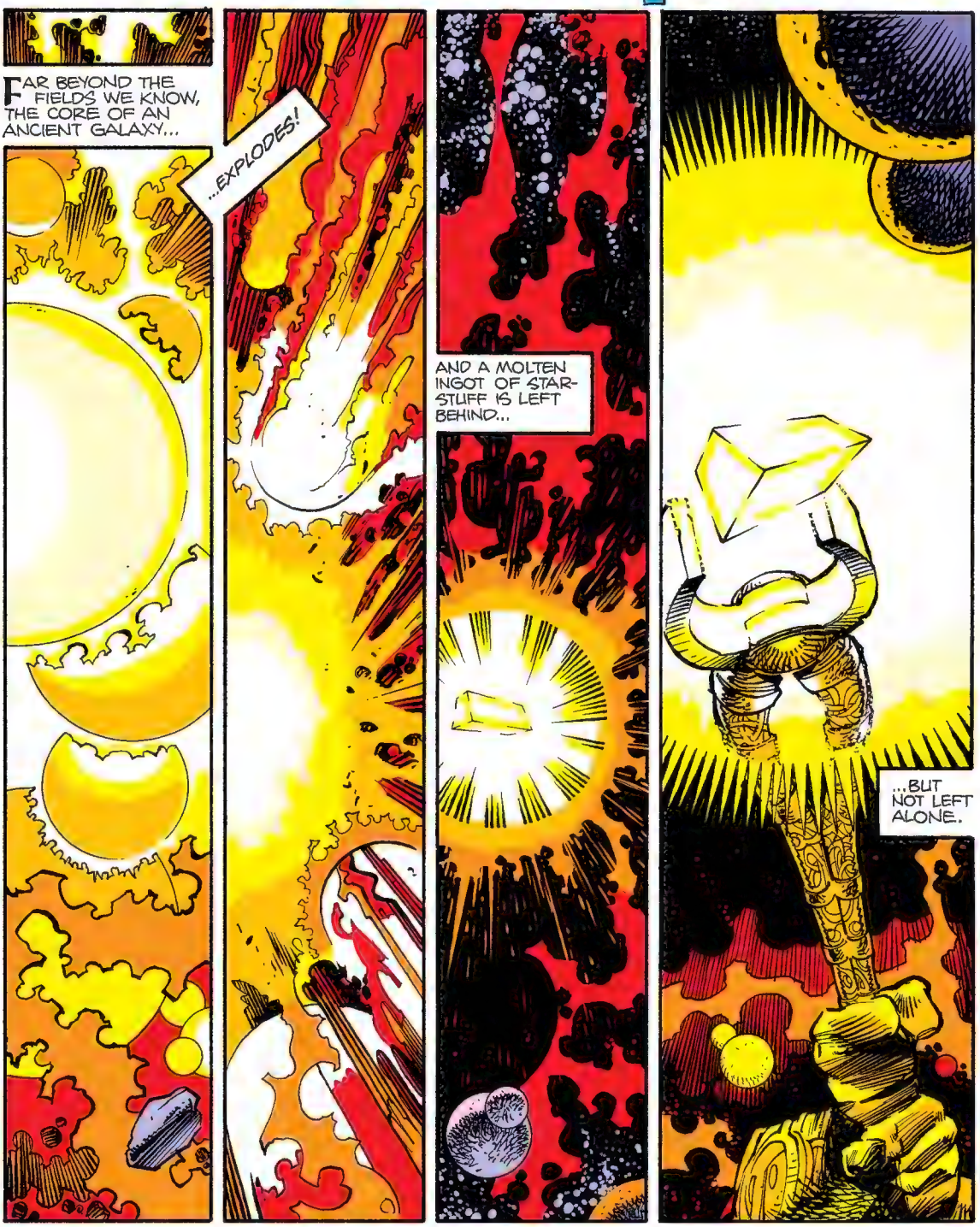
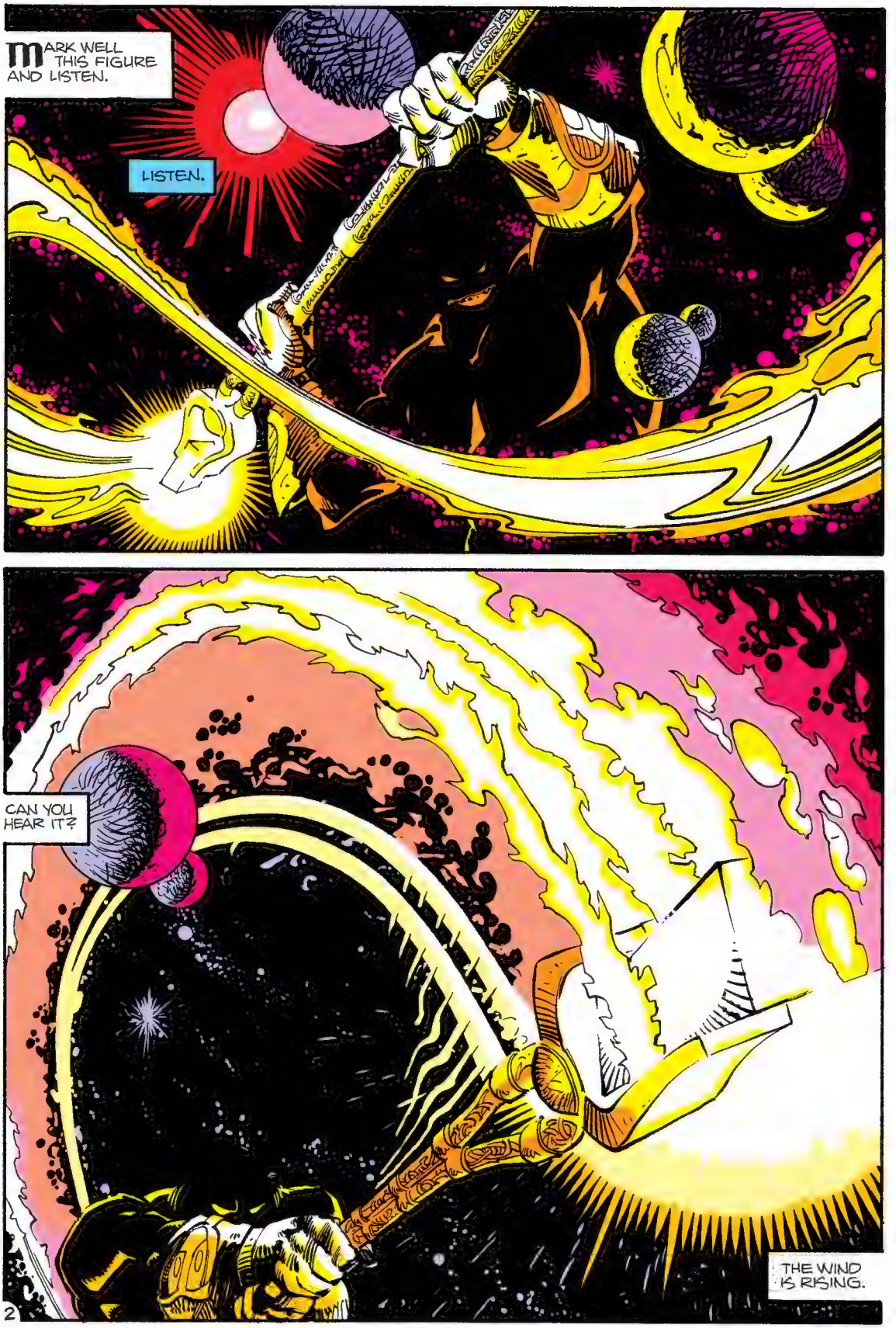
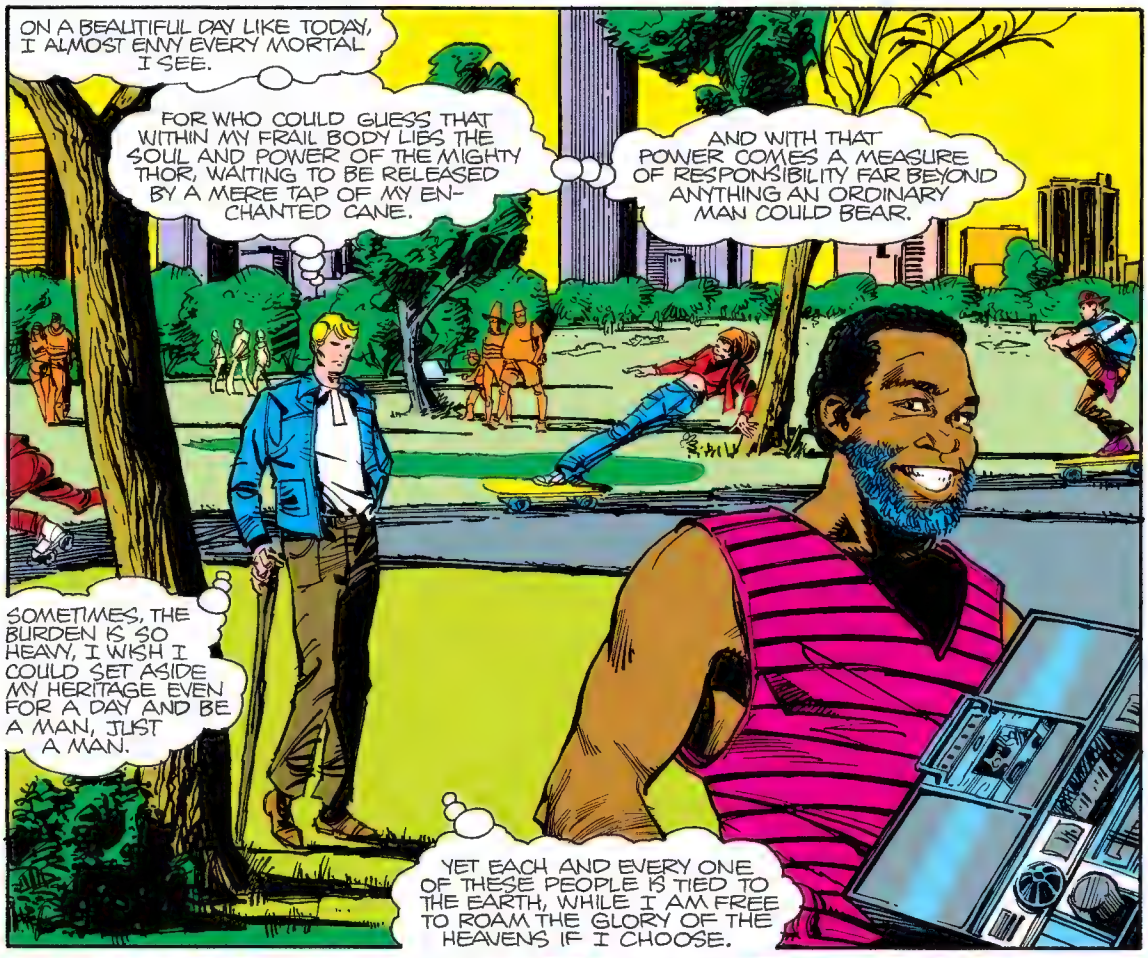
STAN LEE PRESENTS: the MIGHTY THOR®

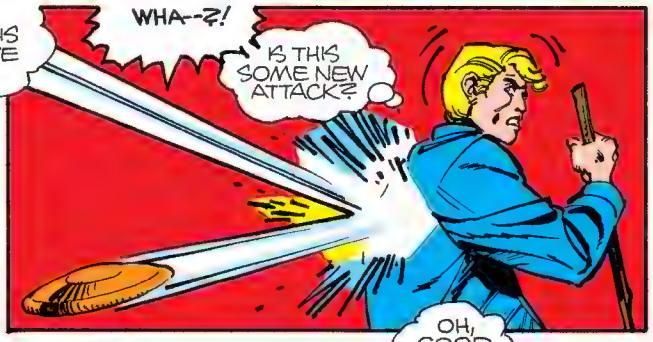

FAR BEYOND THE FIELDS WE KNOW, THE CORE OF AN ANCIENT GALAXY...
...EXPLODES!
AND A MOLTEN INGOT OF STAR-STUFF IS LEFT BEHIND...
...BUT NOT LEFT ALONE.


MARK WELL THIS FIGURE AND LISTEN.
LISTEN.
CAN YOU HEAR IT?
THE WIND IS RISING.
2

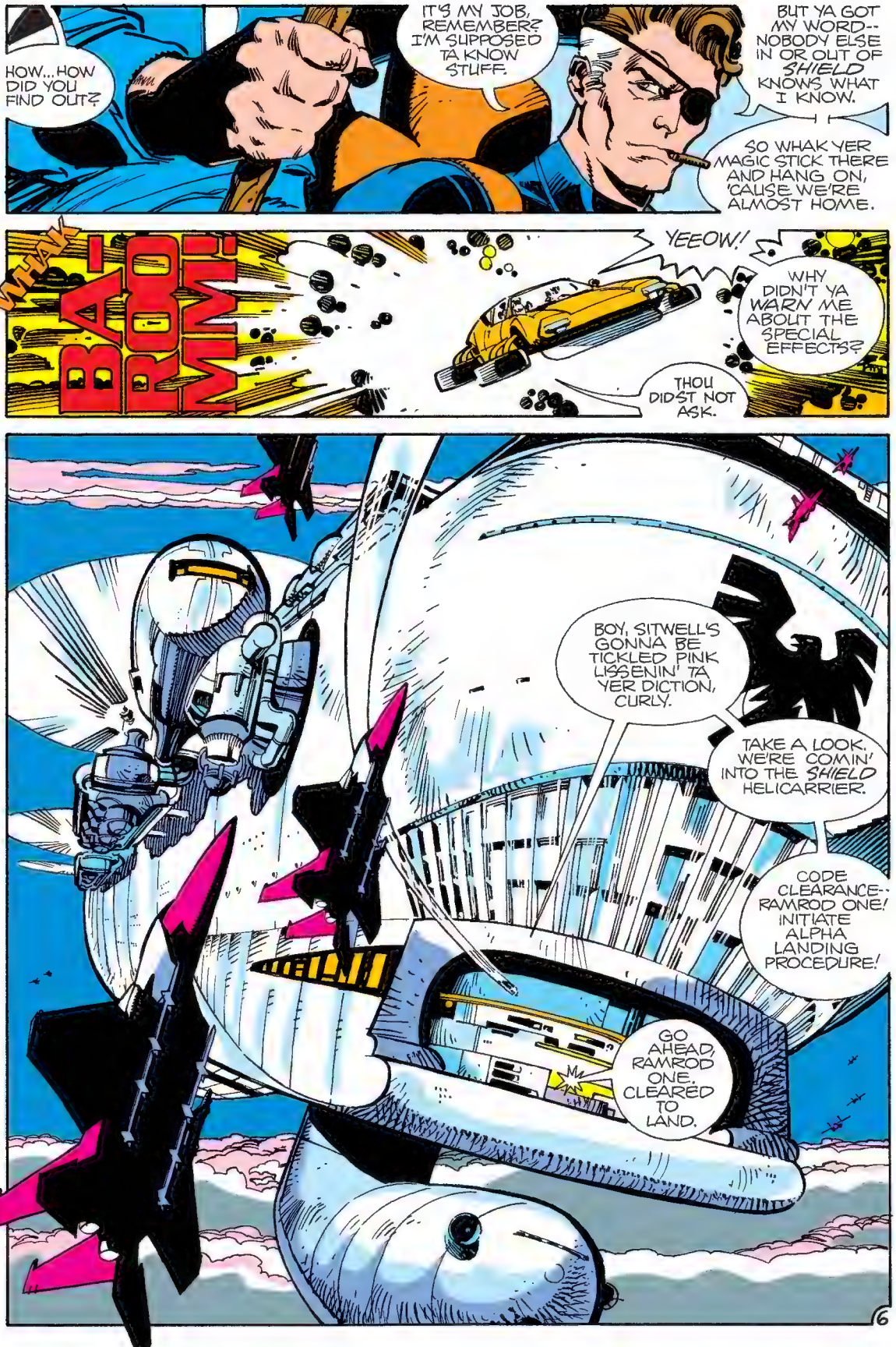
THE SOUND OF THUNDER REVERBERATES THROUGHOUT A BILLION BILLION WORLDS.
DOOM!

YET HERE ON EARTH, THE ECHOES ARE BURIED BENEATH THE SOUNDS OF THE CITY, AS CHICAGO BASKS IN A SUMMER AFTERNOON, AND DR. DONALD BLAKE STROLLS THROUGH GRANT PARK...


ON A BEAUTIFUL DAY LIKE TODAY, I ALMOST ENVY EVERY MORTAL I SEE.
FOR WHO COULD GUESS THAT WITHIN MY FRAIL BODY LIES THE SOUL AND POWER OF THE MIGHTY THOR, WAITING TO BE RELEASED BY A MERE TAP OF MY ENCHANTED CANE.
AND WITH THAT POWER COMES A MEASURE OF RESPONSIBILITY FAR BEYOND ANYTHING AN ORDINARY MAN COULD BEAR.
SOMETIMES, THE BURDEN IS SO HEAVY, I WISH I COULD SET ASIDE MY HERITAGE EVEN FOR A DAY AND BE A MAN, JUST A MAN.
YET EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THESE PEOPLE IS TIED TO THE EARTH, WHILE I AM FREE TO ROAM THE GLORY OF THE HEAVENS IF I CHOOSE.



WHY NOT LET US BE THE JUDGES OF THAT, MISTER. A LAME GUY LIKE YOURSELF--YOU LOOK LIKE YOU COULD USE SOME HELP.
LET ME TAKE YOUR CANE.
HEY!
NOT TOO LOUD NOW, BUB. YOU'RE JUST GOING FOR A LITTLE RIDE.
THROW THE STICK IN, TOO, BOYS.
SURE THING, COLONEL.
YOU'RE ALL SET, SIR.
SLAM!
ANY IDEA WHAT'S GOING ON?
BEATS ME.
VARROOOOM!
WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE--
COLONEL NICK FURY!
YOU WIN THE KEWPIE DOLL, DOCTOR BLAKE.
SORRY TA GRAB YA SO DRAMATIC-LIKE, BUT WE NEED YER HELP ...FAST!
HOLD ON TA YER HELMET.
I'M CONVERTIN' TA AERIAL MODE!
WHAT IS THIS, FURY? WHY DOES THE DIRECTOR OF SHIELD--
--NEED AN ORDINARY SAWBONES?
I DON'T. I NEED YOUR OTHER HALF!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
LOOK, DOC, I'LL LEVEL WITH YA.
WE GOT AN EMERGENCY ON OUR HANDS LIKE WE AIN'T SEEN BEFORE.
ONLY ONE GUY I KNOW OF CAN MAYBE HANDLE IT.
AND HE PACKS A HAMMER THAT MAKES OUR LATEST WEAPONS LOOK LIKE TINKERTOYS!
5

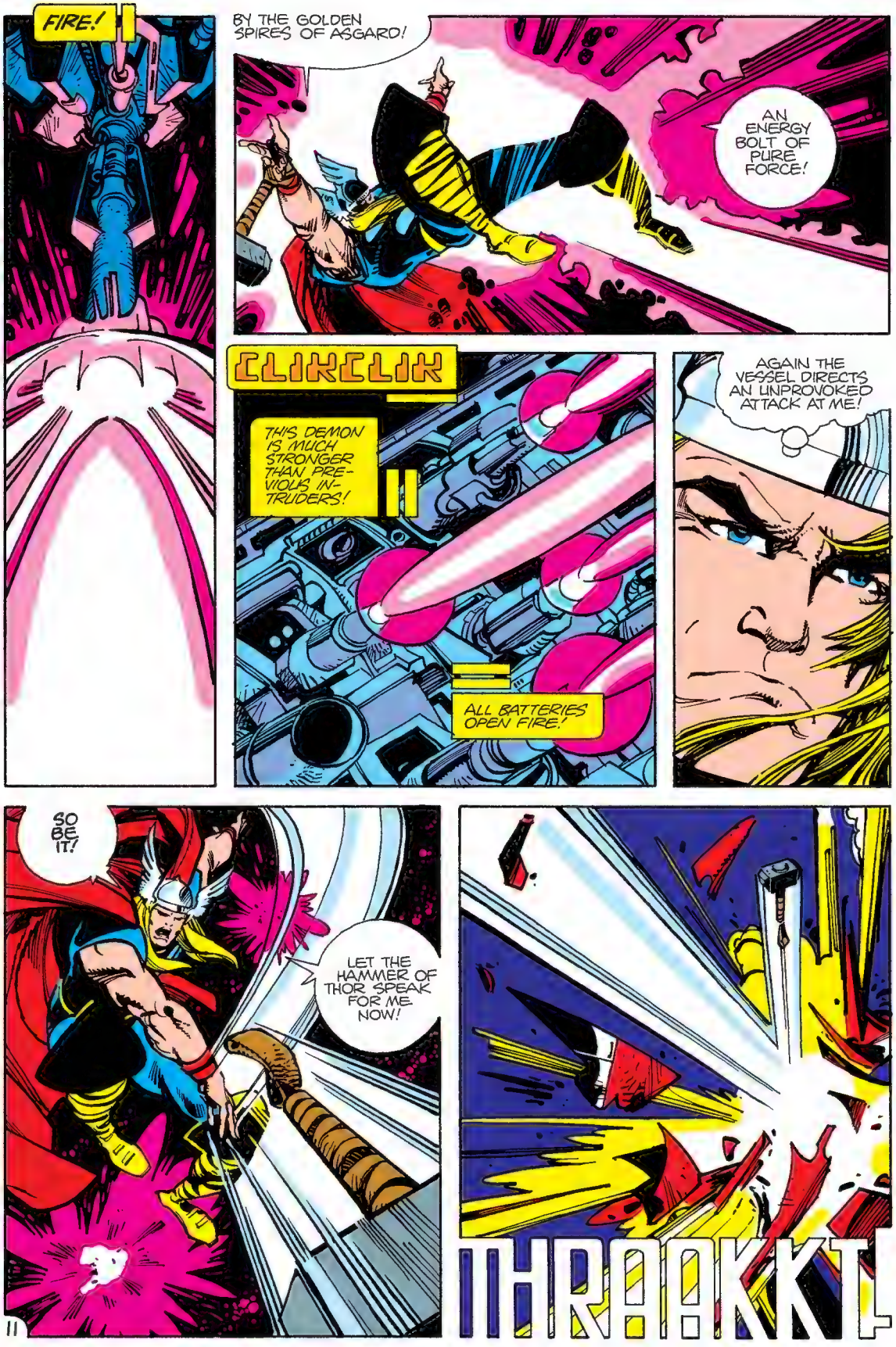

HOW... HOW DID YOU FIND OUT?
IT'S MY JOB, REMEMBER? I'M SUPPOSED TA KNOW STUFF.
BUT YA GOT MY WORD-- NOBODY ELSE IN OR OUT OF SHIELD KNOWS WHAT I KNOW.
SO WHAK YER MAGIC STICK THERE AND HANG ON, 'CAUSE WE'RE ALMOST HOME.
WHAK
BA-ROOM!
YEEOW!
WHY DIDN'T YA WARN ME ABOUT THE SPECIAL EFFECTS?
THOU DIDST NOT ASK.
BOY, SITWELL'S GONNA BE TICKLED PINK LISSENIN' TA YER DICTION, CURLY.
TAKE A LOOK. WE'RE COMIN' INTO THE SHIELD HELICARRIER.
CODE CLEARANCE-- RAMROD ONE! INITIATE ALPHA LANDING PROCEDURE!
GO AHEAD, RAMROD ONE. CLEARED TO LAND.
6

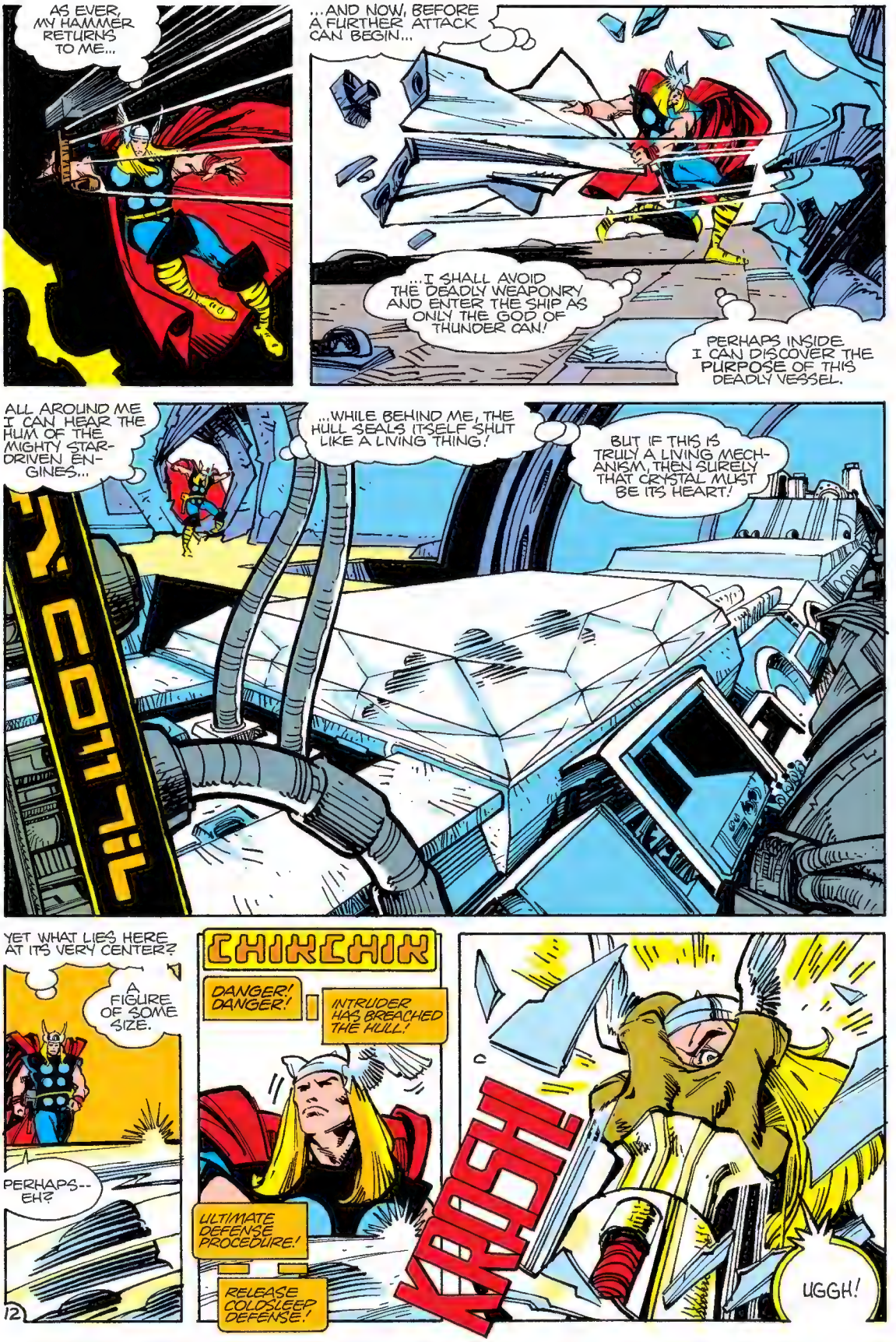
SHORTLY, IN A DARKENED SHIELD SCREENING ROOM...
SITWELL'S OUR LOCAL ENCYCLOPEDIA. IF HE DON'T KNOW IT, IT AIN'T A FACT!
OKAY, SITWELL, FILL IN OUR GUEST AND MAKE IT SNAPPY, HUH?
WELL, SIR, YOUR HONOR... AHEM...THIS IS THE VERY LATEST DEVELOPMENT FROM OUR TELEMETRY DIVISION.
AN EXPERIMENTAL WARP-DRIVEN PROBE CAPABLE OF COVERING UNIMAGINABLE DISTANCES AND TRANSMITTING PICTURES INSTANTANEOUSLY VIA HYPER-WAVE BACK TO A RECEIVER.
NAMELY US.
OPERATING ON AN ASSIGNED CARRIER FREQUENCY OF--
THE GUTS, SITWELL, JUST THE GUTS!
YESSIR! THESE ARE THE LAST PICTURES WE RECEIVED FROM THE PROBE. NOTE THE APPARENT VESSEL IN CENTER SCREEN.
AN ALIEN SHIP, UNLIKE ANYTHING WE'VE EVER SEEN BEFORE.
NOW WATCH THE STAR.
AS THE SHIP PASSED BY IT, THE STAR SUDDENLY FLARED TO LIFE...
...AND WAS SUCKED IN BY THE SHIP.
OUR EXPERTS THINK THE VESSEL WAS REFUELING AND DESTROYED AN ENTIRE STAR TO DO IT.
SHORTLY THEREAFTER, THE PROBE WAS DETECTED BY THE ALIEN SHIP AND ALL TRANSMISSION CEASED.
ACCORDING TO OUR BEST ESTIMATES, THE SHIP IS TRAVELING AT SEVERAL TIMES LIGHT SPEED...
...HEADING DIRECTLY FOR OUR SOLAR SYSTEM.
AND THE PROBE?
DEADER'N A DOORNAIL, THOR. BLOWN APART BY SOMETHING COMING OUR WAY.
SOMETHING REAL POWERFUL! AND DANGEROUS!
WE GOTTA FIND OUT WHAT IT IS! AND YER THE ONLY JOE WHO CAN DO IT!
WILL YA HELP US?
7

THE ANSWER IS NOT LONG IN COMING...
...YET EVEN AS THE MIGHTY THOR ARCS SKYWARD...
...FAR BEYOND THIS REALM OF SPACE AND TIME, IN THE GOLDEN HALLS OF ASGARD, HOME OF THE NORSE GODS, ALL IS NOT WELL.
AH, MILADY SIF, COME AND JOIN BALDER AND MYSELF IN A HEARTY REPAST.
WE'VE HARDLY BEGUN—ONLY SIXTEEN COURSES SINCE BREAKFAST—AND BALDER IS LATELY GLUM COMPANY!
I CAN SCARCELY CREDIT IT!
8

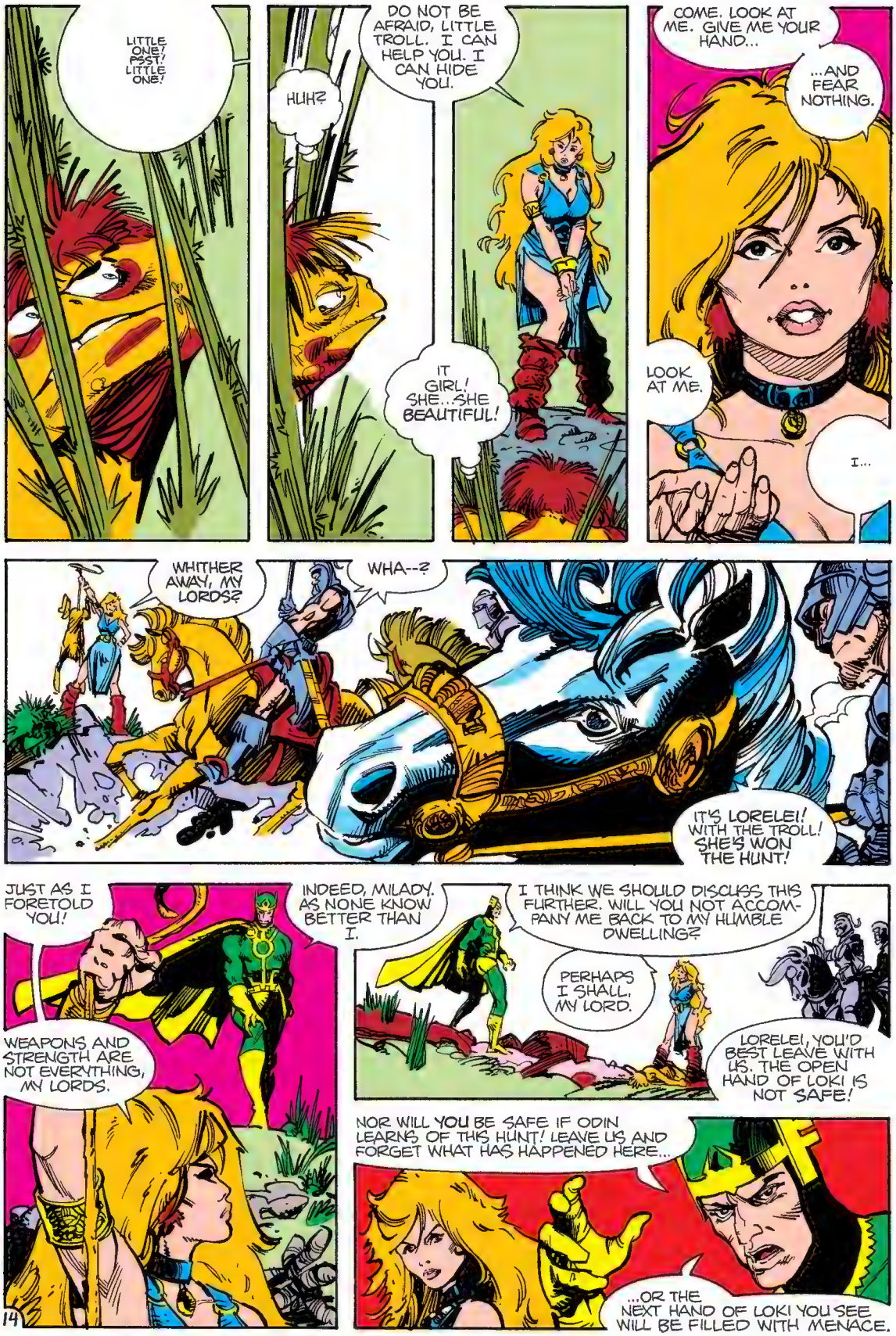
BRAVE BALDER, I RETURN TO ASGARD FROM EARTH ONLY TO FIND YOU IN THE MEAD HALL WITH VOLSTAGG THE ENORMOUS, FEASTING WITHOUT RESPITE!
THOR HAS FORSAKEN ME FOR MIDGARD.*
*EARTH.
MY HEART, MY SOUL ARE EMPTY.
I NEED YOUR STRENGTH, YOUR UNDER-STANDING, YOUR TENDERNESS...
THEN SEEK SOLACE ELSEWHERE, LADY. BALDER THE BRAVE IS NO MORE.
HE WHO HAS RETURNED FROM HELA'S DARK DOMAIN IS NOT FIT TO BE A MAN MUCH LESS A GOD!
I HAVE FORSWORN ALL BATTLES SAVE THIS ONE-THAT I WILL FORGET EVERYTHING I HAVE EVER CHERISHED...
...DEFEATING AT LAST THE FEARFUL CURSE OF THE MEMORY OF THE GOD I ONCE WAS.
ETERNITY IS A LONG TIME, MILADY. BALDER THE BRAVE IS A MYTH I HAVE OUTLIVED.
SOMEONE APPROACHES HEIMDALL THE WATCHER.
BY WHOSE LEAVE DO YOU TREAD UPON BIFROST, THE RAINBOW BRIDGE?
IT IS I, SIF. I HAVE COME BECAUSE I HAVE NOWHERE ELSE TO TURN.
SIF, DEAR SISTER, I HAVE HEARD YOUR TROUBLES. WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE ME DO?
I AM A SHIELD MAIDEN, MY BROTHER. YOUR EYES AND EARS SEE AND HEAR ALL THINGS.
WHITHER CAN I FIND THE CLASH OF BATTLE TO MAKE ME HAPPY AND EASE MY EMPTINESS?
MY POOR DAR-LING. MAYHAP ONLY ODIN HIMSELF CAN HELP YOU NOW.
9

MEANWHILE, A LONG WAY FROM EARTH...
THE POWER OF MY ENCHANTED MALLET TO CROSS TIME AND SPACE HAS BROUGHT ME CLOSE TO THE ALIEN VESSEL...
...AND RESTORED MY FAITH IN MY HERITAGE! WHAT MORTAL COULD DO WHAT I HAVE DONE?
'TIS GOOD TO BE THE GOD OF THUNDER!
ODIN'S BLOOD! THE SHIP OUTRACES ME AS THE HARE OUTRACES THE TORTOISE!
I MUST INCREASE MY SPEED A HUNDREDFOLD IF I AM TO OVERTAKE YON VESSEL.
BUT OVERTAKE IT I SHALL!
ITS APPEARANCE REFLECTS A GRIM AND SERIOUS PURPOSE. T'WOULD SEEM TO BE A WARSHIP!
CHIKCHIKCHIK
SENSORS DETECT UNIDENTIFIED PURSUER ON INTERCEPT COURSE. ENERGY CONFIGURATIONS SIMILAR TO DEMON BREED. PREPARE TO OPEN FIRE.
MAIN BATTERIES CHARGED AND READY.
TARGET LOCKED MAGNIFICATION THREE.
TARGET CLOSING.
10


FIRE!
BY THE GOLDEN SPIRES OF ASGARD!
AN ENERGY BOLT OF PURE FORCE!
CLIKCLIK
THIS DEMON IS MUCH STRONGER THAN PREVIOUS INTRUDERS!
ALL BATTERIES OPEN FIRE!
AGAIN THE VESSEL DIRECTS AN UNPROVOKED ATTACK AT ME!
SO BE IT!
LET THE HAMMER OF THOR SPEAK FOR ME NOW!
THRAAKKT!

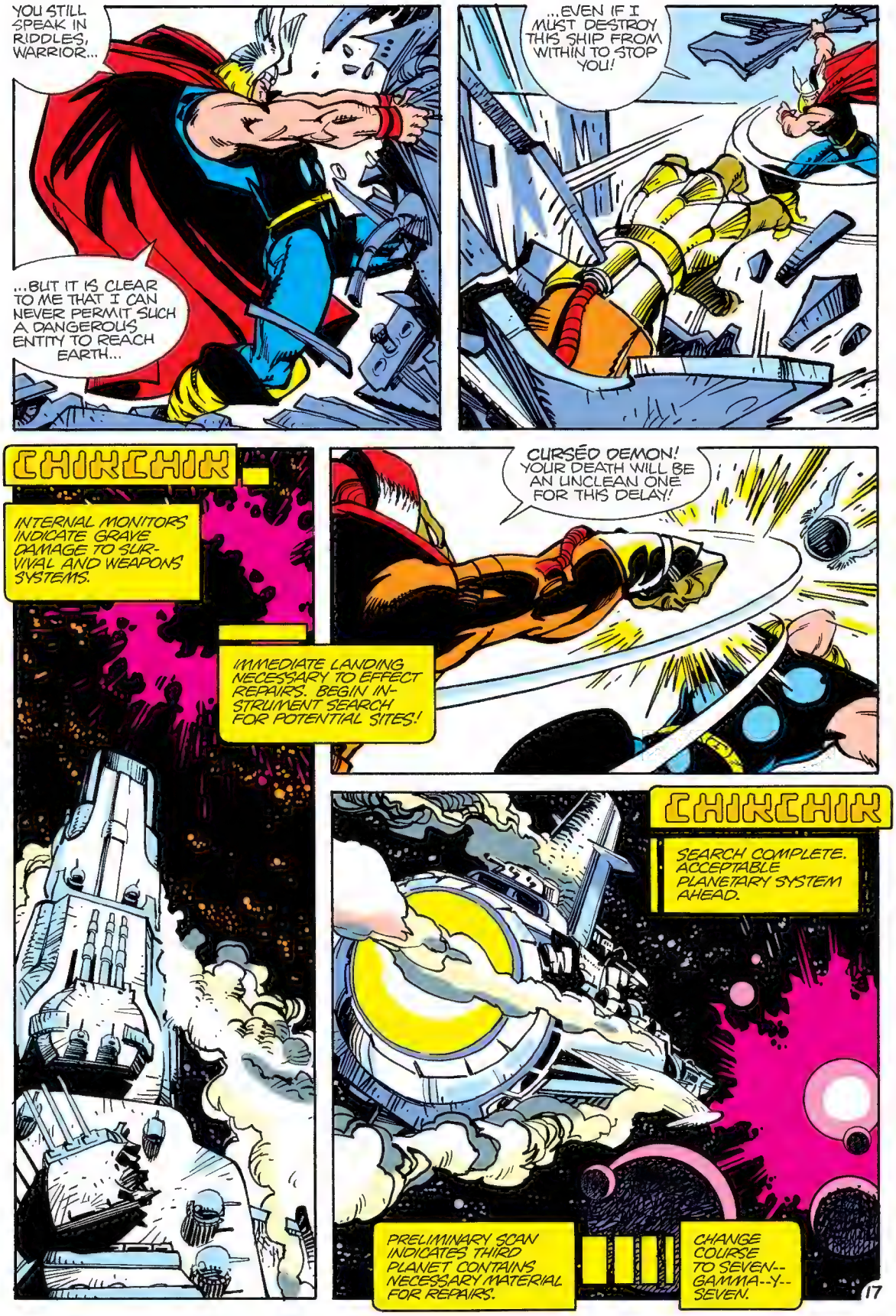

AS EVER, MY HAMMER RETURNS TO ME...
...AND NOW, BEFORE A FURTHER ATTACK CAN BEGIN...
...I SHALL AVOID THE DEADLY WEAPONRY AND ENTER THE SHIP AS ONLY THE GOD OF THUNDER CAN!
PERHAPS INSIDE I CAN DISCOVER THE PURPOSE OF THIS DEADLY VESSEL.
ALL AROUND ME I CAN HEAR THE HUM OF THE MIGHTY STAR-DRIVEN EN-GINES...
...WHILE BEHIND ME, THE HULL SEALS ITSELF SHUT LIKE A LIVING THING!
BUT IF THIS IS TRULY A LIVING MECH-ANISM, THEN SURELY THAT CRYSTAL MUST BE ITS HEART!
YET WHAT LIES HERE AT ITS VERY CENTER?
A FIGURE OF SOME SIZE.
PERHAPS-- EH?
CHIKCHIK
DANGER! DANGER!
INTRUDER HAS BREACHED THE HULL!
ULTIMATE DEFENSE PROCEDURE!
RELEASE COLDSLEEP DEFENSE!
KRASH!
UGGH!
12

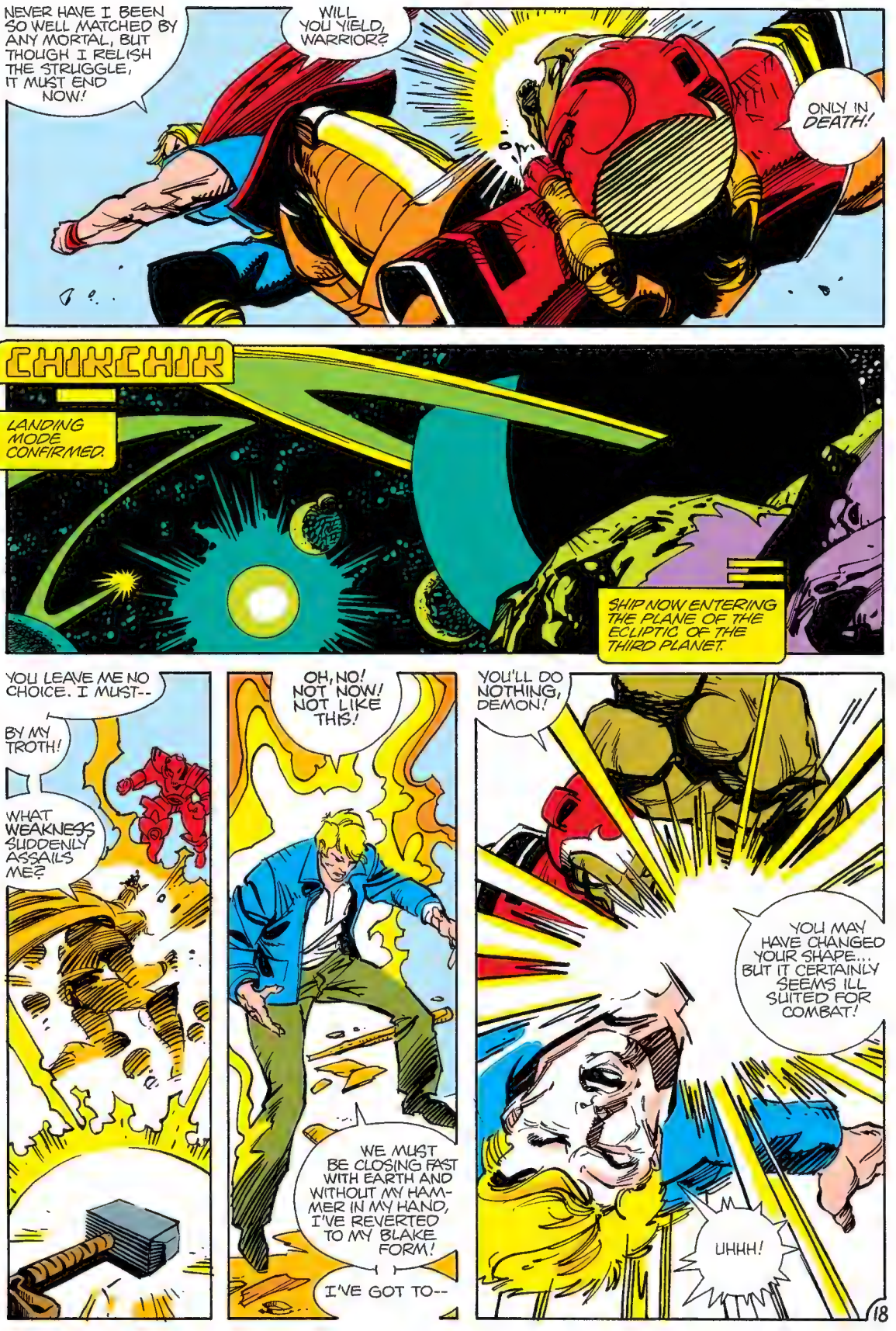
BUT EVEN AS THOR STRUGGLES FOR BREATH, LET US TURN TO A DESOLATE CORNER OF ASGARD TO FIND...
I AM BORED TO DEATH!
TO THINK THAT LOKI, PRINCE OF DARKNESS, SHOULD WASTE HIS TIME IN MONOTONOUS EXILE WHILE CHEER AND GOOD FELLOWSHIP ABOUND IN THE LAND.
BAH! I'VE HALF A MIND TO...
...BUT SOFTLY! WHAT'S THIS I HEAR?
WHO DARES TO PASS SO CLOSE TO LOKI'S LONELY ABODE?
"SO! A FEW LACKWIT WARRIORS VENTURE TO ENGAGE IN A FORBIDDEN TROLL HUNT!
"I BELIEVE THE END OF MY BOREDOM IS AT HAND!"
PUFF PUFF
MUST HIDE! MUST HIDE! OR HUNTERS SLAY ME!
DID YOU SEE?
YES, HELGI, THE TROLL'S GONE TO COVER IN THOSE THISTLES!
BY YMIR'S BEARD, WE MAY NEVER FLUSH HIM NOW!
13


LITTLE ONE! PSST! LITTLE ONE!
HUH?
DO NOT BE AFRAID, LITTLE TROLL. I CAN HELP YOU. I CAN HIDE YOU.
IT GIRL! SHE...SHE BEAUTIFUL!
COME. LOOK AT ME. GIVE ME YOUR HAND...
...AND FEAR NOTHING.
LOOK AT ME.
I...
WHITHER AWAY, MY LORDS?
WHA--?
IT'S LORELEI! WITH THE TROLL! SHE'S WON THE HUNT!
JUST AS I FORETOLD YOU!
WEAPONS AND STRENGTH ARE NOT EVERYTHING, MY LORDS.
INDEED, MILADY. AS NONE KNOW BETTER THAN I.
I THINK WE SHOULD DISCUSS THIS FURTHER. WILL YOU NOT ACCOMPANY ME BACK TO MY HUMBLE DWELLING?
PERHAPS I SHALL, MY LORD.
LORELEI, YOU'D BEST LEAVE WITH US. THE OPEN HAND OF LOKI IS NOT SAFE!
NOR WILL YOU BE SAFE IF ODIN LEARNS OF THIS HUNT! LEAVE US AND FORGET WHAT HAS HAPPENED HERE...
...OR THE NEXT HAND OF LOKI YOU SEE WILL BE FILLED WITH MENACE.
14

MEANWHILE, ABOARD THE ALIEN SHIP...
BRAASH!
WHAT MANNER OF BEING IS THIS WHO SO CAVALIERLY TOSSES THE GOD OF THUNDER ABOUT LIKE A BALE OF NEW-MOWN HAY?
RISE UP, DEMON!
YOU! HAVE PURSUED ME ONLY TO FIND DEATH!
AND WHEN I AM THROUGH WITH YOU, YOU WILL WELCOME IT!
I AM CALLED BILL--BETA RAY BILL!
15

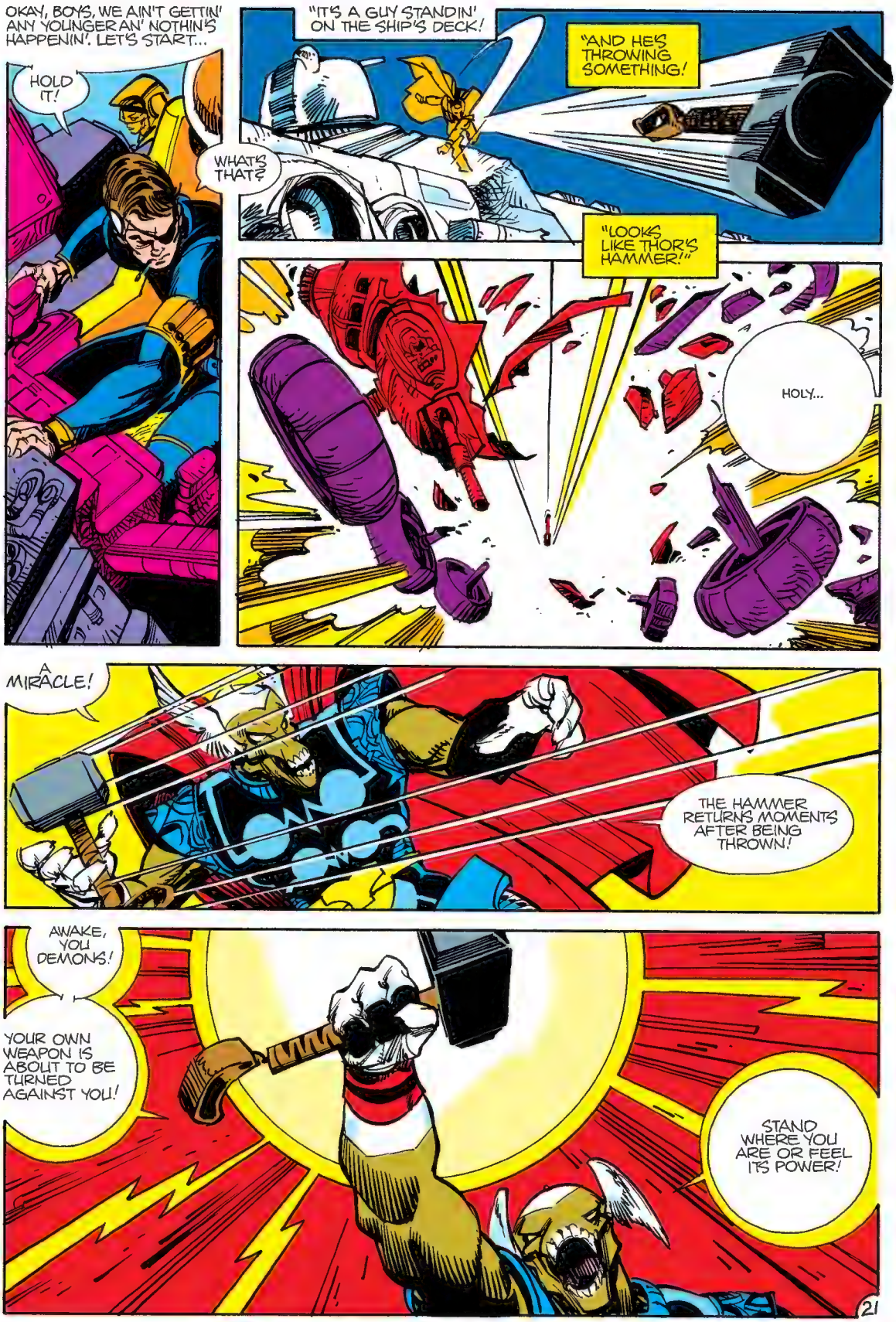
BUT DO NOT TROUBLE YOURSELF TO REMEMBER IT!
YOU SHOULD HAVE WAITED FOR YOUR FELLOWS TO ARRIVE RATHER THAN FACE ME ALONE!
I DO NOT KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN, CREATURE...
...BUT NONE MAY TOUCH THE MIGHTY THOR SO WITHOUT PAYING THE PRICE!
YET HOW IS IT YOU SPEAK MY TONGUE?
AAGGH!
THE SHIP WAS RIGHT! YOU ARE MUCH STRONGER THAN YOUR PREDECESSORS!
APPARENTLY THE BREED IS IMPROVING!
BUT IT WILL NOT SAVE YOU!
KRANG!
SKUTTLEBUTT HAS DECIPHERED YOUR BARBAROUS LANGUAGE AND RELAYED IT TO ME THROUGH MY CRYSTAL CHAMBER!
THUS I SHALL ENGRAVE YOUR EPITAPH IN YOUR OWN TONGUE ON MY NEW WORLD...
...ON THE MEMORIAL CELEBRATING MY VICTORY OVER YOU AND ALL OF DEMONKIND!
16


YOU STILL SPEAK IN RIDDLES, WARRIOR...
...BUT IT IS CLEAR TO ME THAT I CAN NEVER PERMIT SUCH A DANGEROUS ENTITY TO REACH EARTH...
...EVEN IF I MUST DESTROY THIS SHIP FROM WITHIN TO STOP YOU!
CHIKCHIK
INTERNAL MONITORS INDICATE GRAVE DAMAGE TO SURVIVAL AND WEAPONS SYSTEMS.
IMMEDIATE LANDING NECESSARY TO EFFECT REPAIRS. BEGIN INSTRUMENT SEARCH FOR POTENTIAL SITES!
CURSED DEMON! YOUR DEATH WILL BE AN UNCLEAN ONE FOR THIS DELAY!
CHIKCHIK
SEARCH COMPLETE. ACCEPTABLE PLANETARY SYSTEM AHEAD.
PRELIMINARY SCAN INDICATES THIRD PLANET CONTAINS NECESSARY MATERIAL FOR REPAIRS.
CHANGE COURSE TO SEVEN--GAMMA--Y--SEVEN.
17

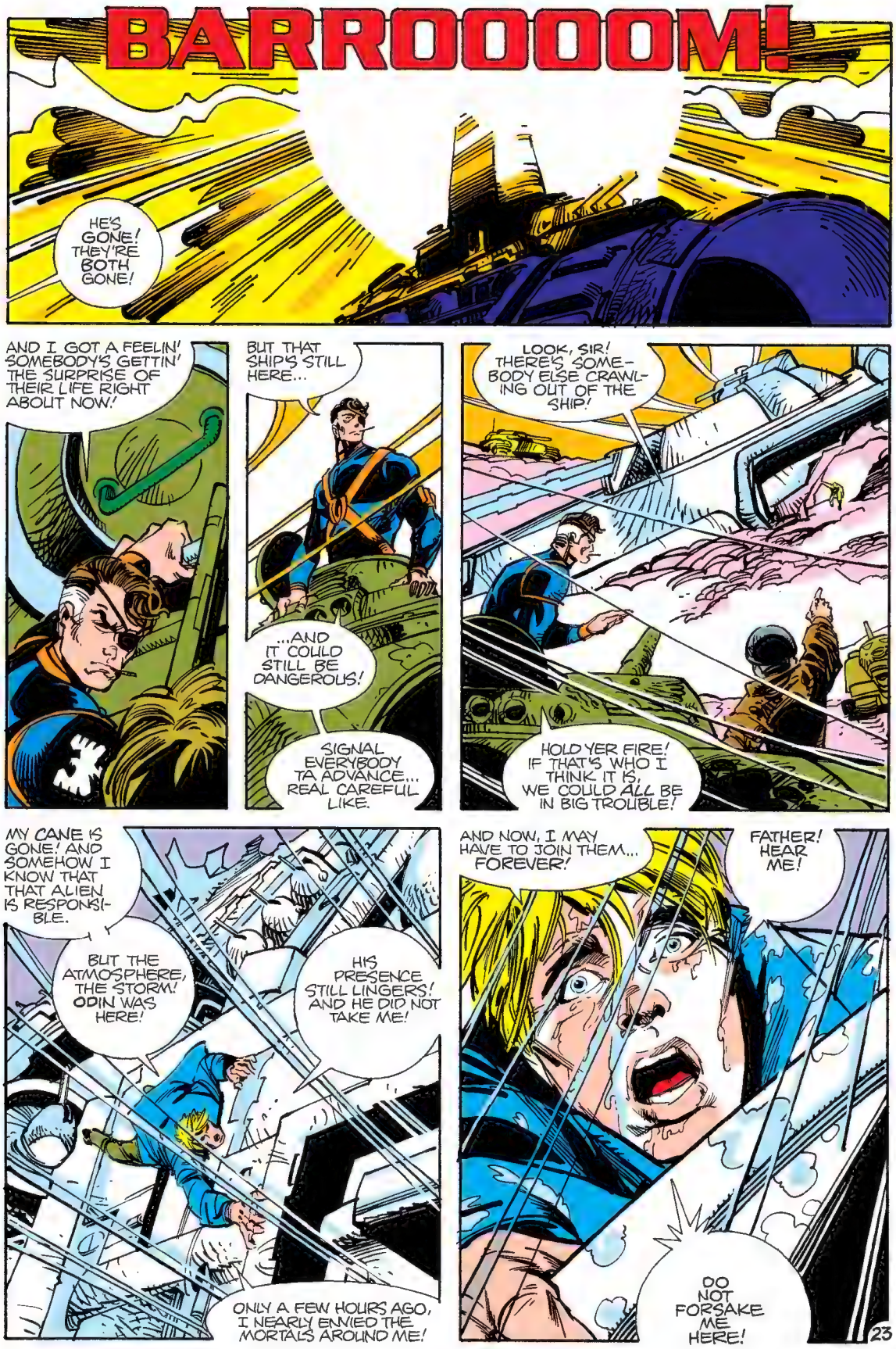

NEVER HAVE I BEEN SO WELL MATCHED BY ANY MORTAL, BUT THOUGH I RELISH THE STRUGGLE, IT MUST END NOW!
WILL YOU YIELD, WARRIOR?
ONLY IN DEATH!
CHIKCHIK
LANDING MODE CONFIRMED.
SHIP NOW ENTERING THE PLANE OF THE ECLIPTIC OF THE THIRD PLANET.
YOU LEAVE ME NO CHOICE. I MUST--
BY MY TROTH!
WHAT WEAKNESS SUDDENLY ASSAILS ME?
OH, NO! NOT NOW! NOT LIKE THIS!
WE MUST BE CLOSING FAST WITH EARTH AND WITHOUT MY HAMMER IN MY HAND, I'VE REVERTED TO MY BLAKE FORM!
I'VE GOT TO--
YOU'LL DO NOTHING, DEMON!
YOU MAY HAVE CHANGED YOUR SHAPE... BUT IT CERTAINLY SEEMS ILL SUITED FOR COMBAT!
UHHH!
18

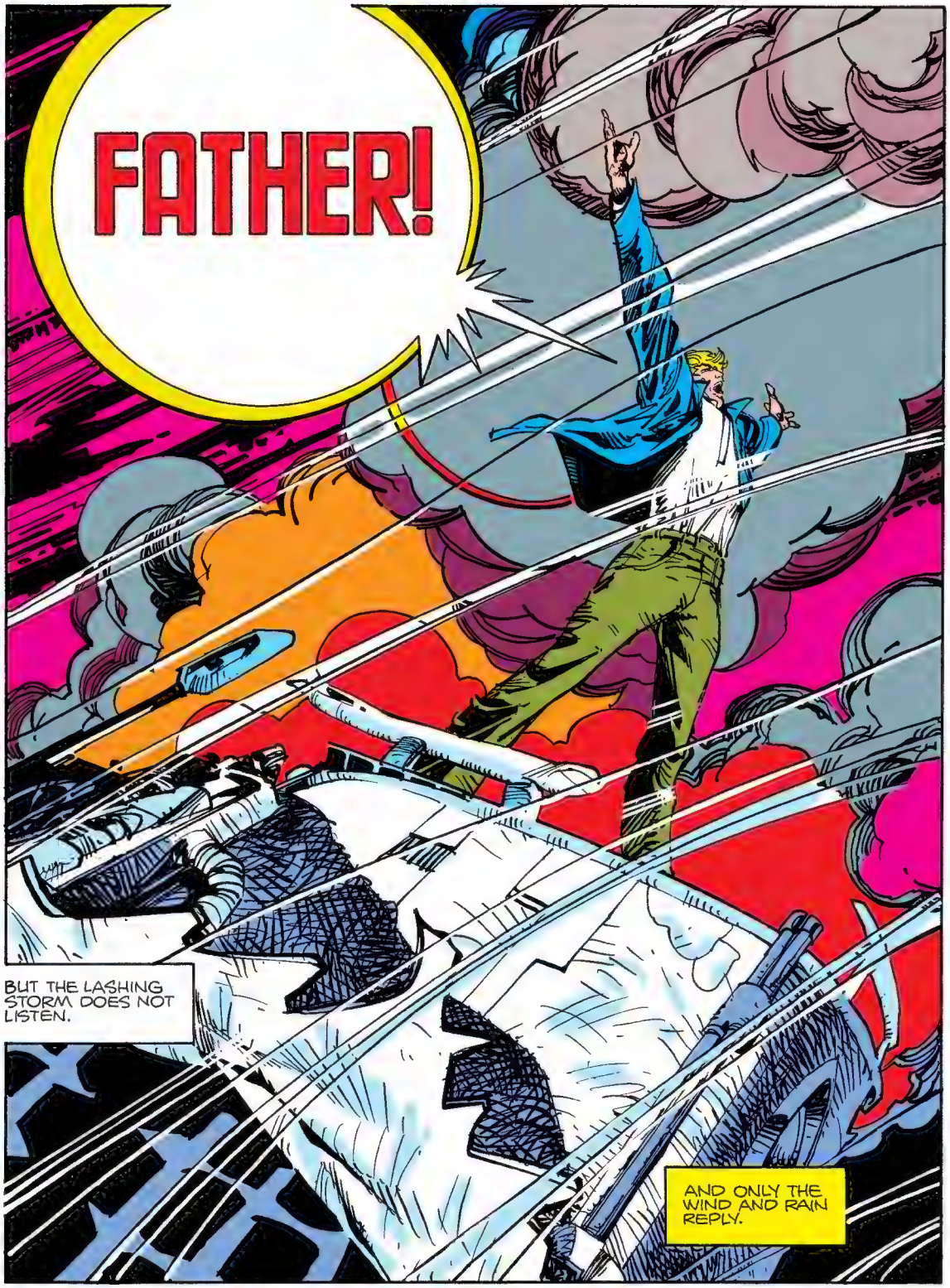
I DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE DEMON'S TRANSFORM-ATION...
...BUT IT WOULD BE UNWISE TO QUESTION SUCH A GIFT HORSE TOO CLOSELY!
CHIKCHIK
ATTENTION! ATTENTION! CRASH LANDING PROCEDURES INITIATED!
PLANETFALL IN THIRTY SECONDS!
QUICKLY, SKUTTLEBUTT.
ENERGIZE A STASIS EGG AROUND ME NOW!
MOMENTS LATER, THE FURIOUS FLIGHT OF THE ALIEN SHIP THUNDERS TO A FIERY END...
AND INSIDE...
THE STASIS FIELD HELD. I AM ALIVE AND UNHARMED.
AND IT WOULD SEEM THAT THE DEMON HAS SURVIVED WITH-IN THE FIELD AS WELL.
SOMETHING I WILL ATTEND TO IN A MOMENT.
SKUTTLE-BUTT, REPORT STATUS.
CHIKCHIK II
WEAPONS CAPABILITY DOWN TO 5%--REPAIR TIME IS 40 HOURS TO LIFTOFF. SCANNERS DETECT APPROACHING VEHICLES WITH CLASS 3 LIFE FORMS.
IN OUR CURRENT STATE, THEY COULD DESTROY US.
I AM ALSO RECEIVING A BROAD-CAST FROM ONE OF THE VEHICLES IN A VARIANT OF THE DEMON'S LANGUAGE.
19

HEADS UP IN THE SHIP! THIS IS NICK FURY, DIRECTOR OF SHIELD TALKIN' AT YA!
WE GOT YA SURROUNDED! WADDYA SAY YOU COME OUT PEACEABLE AND WE'LL TALK!
THE DEMON'S WEAPON! THE HAMMER HE WIELDED SO POWERFULLY!
IT COULD BE MY ONLY CHANCE TO SAVE MY MISSION!
BUT WHERE...?
WHAT'S THIS? A STICK?
THE HAMMER HAS VANISHED!
THUNDER AND LIGHTNING!
THAK!
WHA--?!
I...I HAVE THE POWER! THE STICK WAS THE HAMMER!
AND NOW I...I CAN FEEL THE POWER OF THE DEMON HIMSELF ADDED TO MY OWN!
POWER ENOUGH TO SHAKE THIS PLANET TO ITS FOUNDATIONS!
20


OKAY, BOYS, WE AIN'T GETTIN' ANY YOUNGER AN' NOTHIN'S HAPPENIN'. LET'S START...
HOLD IT!
WHAT'S THAT?
"IT'S A GUY STANDIN' ON THE SHIP'S DECK!
"AND HE'S THROWING SOMETHING!
"LOOKS LIKE THOR'S HAMMER!"
HOLY...
A MIRACLE!
THE HAMMER RETURNS MOMENTS AFTER BEING THROWN!
AWAKE, YOU DEMONS!
YOUR OWN WEAPON IS ABOUT TO BE TURNED AGAINST YOU!
STAND WHERE YOU ARE OR FEEL ITS POWER!
21

WHAT THE HECK IS GOIN' ON? THAT'S THOR'S HAMMER ALL RIGHT BUT THAT SURE ISN'T THOR!
WE'LL FIGURE IT OUT LATER AFTER WE NAIL HIM! OPEN UP, BOYS!
BEYOW!
BEYOW!
VERY WELL, DEMONS! YOU WERE WARNED!
COLONEL FURY, I'M REGISTERING SOME SORT OF ATMOSPHERIC DISTURBANCE!
AND I'M GETTING AN AUDIO SIGNAL, TOO.
IT'S CENTERED AROUND THAT GUY WITH THE HAMMER!
MAYBE HE'S BREWING UP ONE OF HIS STORMS!
I DON'T THINK SO, COLONEL!
THOR, MY SON! WE HAVE URGENT NEED OF THEE IN ASGARD.
I MUST CALL THEE HOME!
22


BARROOOOOM!
HE'S GONE! THEY'RE BOTH GONE!
AND I GOT A FEELIN' SOMEBODY'S GETTIN' THE SURPRISE OF THEIR LIFE RIGHT ABOUT NOW!
BUT THAT SHIP'S STILL HERE...
...AND IT COULD STILL BE DANGEROUS!
SIGNAL EVERYBODY TA ADVANCE... REAL CAREFUL LIKE.
LOOK, SIR! THERE'S SOMEBODY ELSE CRAWLING OUT OF THE SHIP!
HOLD YER FIRE! IF THAT'S WHO I THINK IT IS, WE COULD ALL BE IN BIG TROUBLE!
MY CANE IS GONE! AND SOMEHOW I KNOW THAT THAT ALIEN IS RESPONSIBLE.
BUT THE ATMOSPHERE, THE STORM! ODIN WAS HERE!
HIS PRESENCE STILL LINGERS! AND HE DID NOT TAKE ME!
ONLY A FEW HOURS AGO, I NEARLY ENVIED THE MORTALS AROUND ME!
AND NOW, I MAY HAVE TO JOIN THEM... FOREVER!
FATHER! HEAR ME!
DO NOT FORSAKE ME HERE!
23



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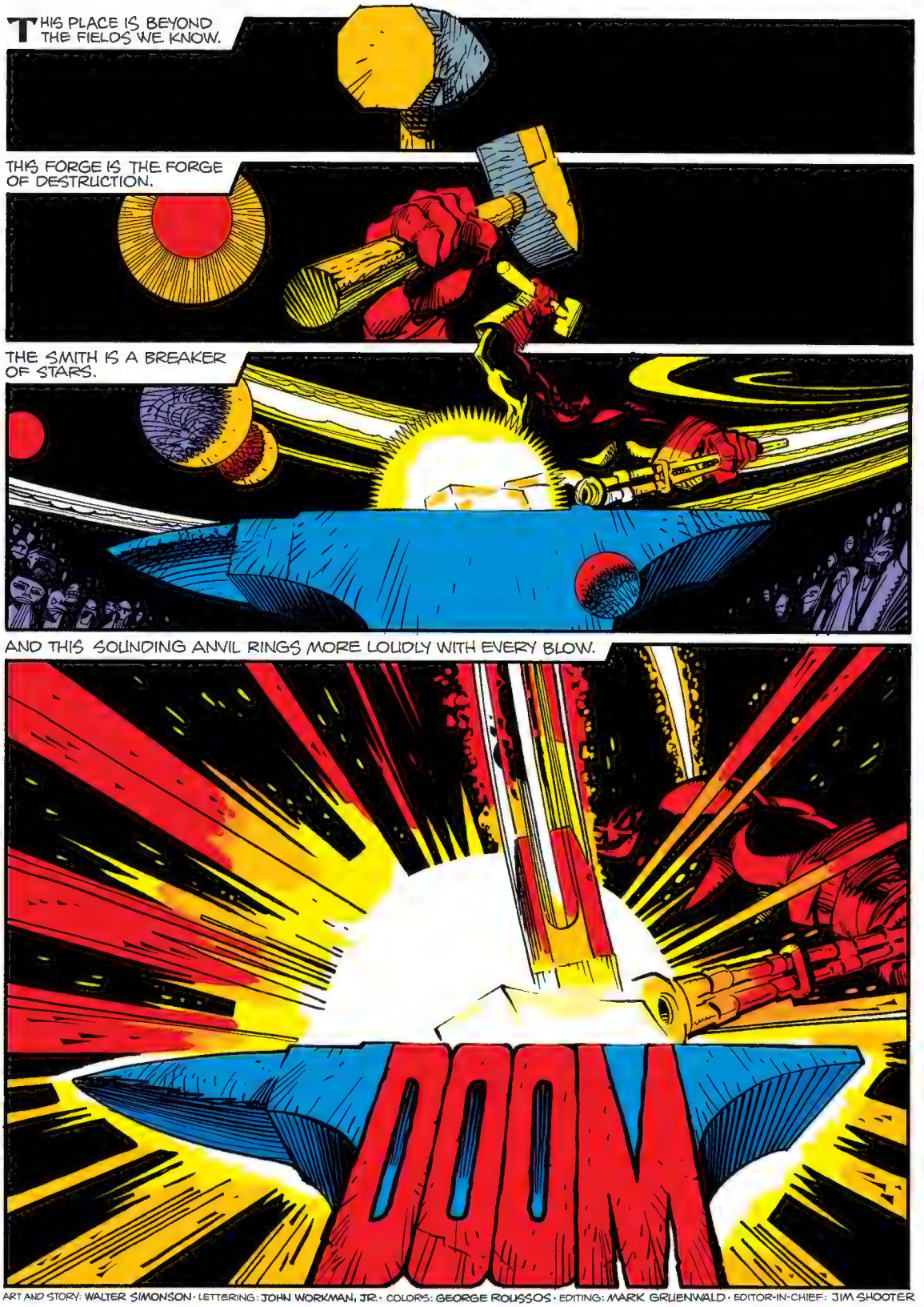
EDITING: MARK GRUENWALD · EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: JIM SHOOTER

NEXT--A FOOL AND HIS HAMMER...

BE HERE! 'CAUSE WE'LL MISS YOU IF YOU'RE NOT AROUND.

MARVEL
the mighty
THOR
60¢
338
DEC
02450
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
WHOSOEVER HOLDS THIS HAMMER, IF HE BE WORTHY, SHALL POSSESS THE POWER OF THOR


THIS PLACE IS BEYOND THE FIELDS WE KNOW.
THIS FORGE IS THE FORGE OF DESTRUCTION.
THE SMITH IS A BREAKER OF STARS.
AND THIS SOUNDING ANVIL RINGS MORE LOUDLY WITH EVERY BLOW.
DOOM

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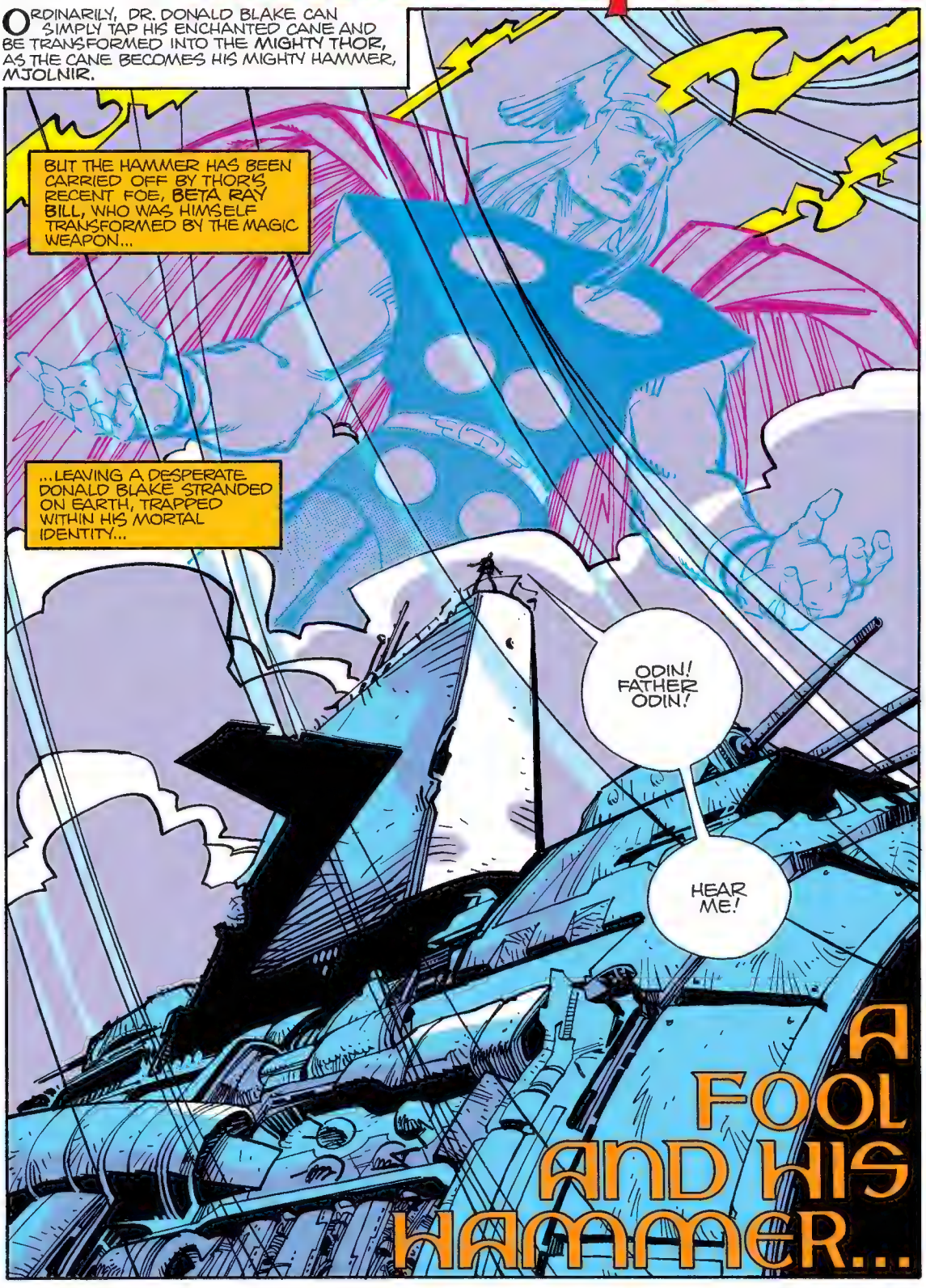
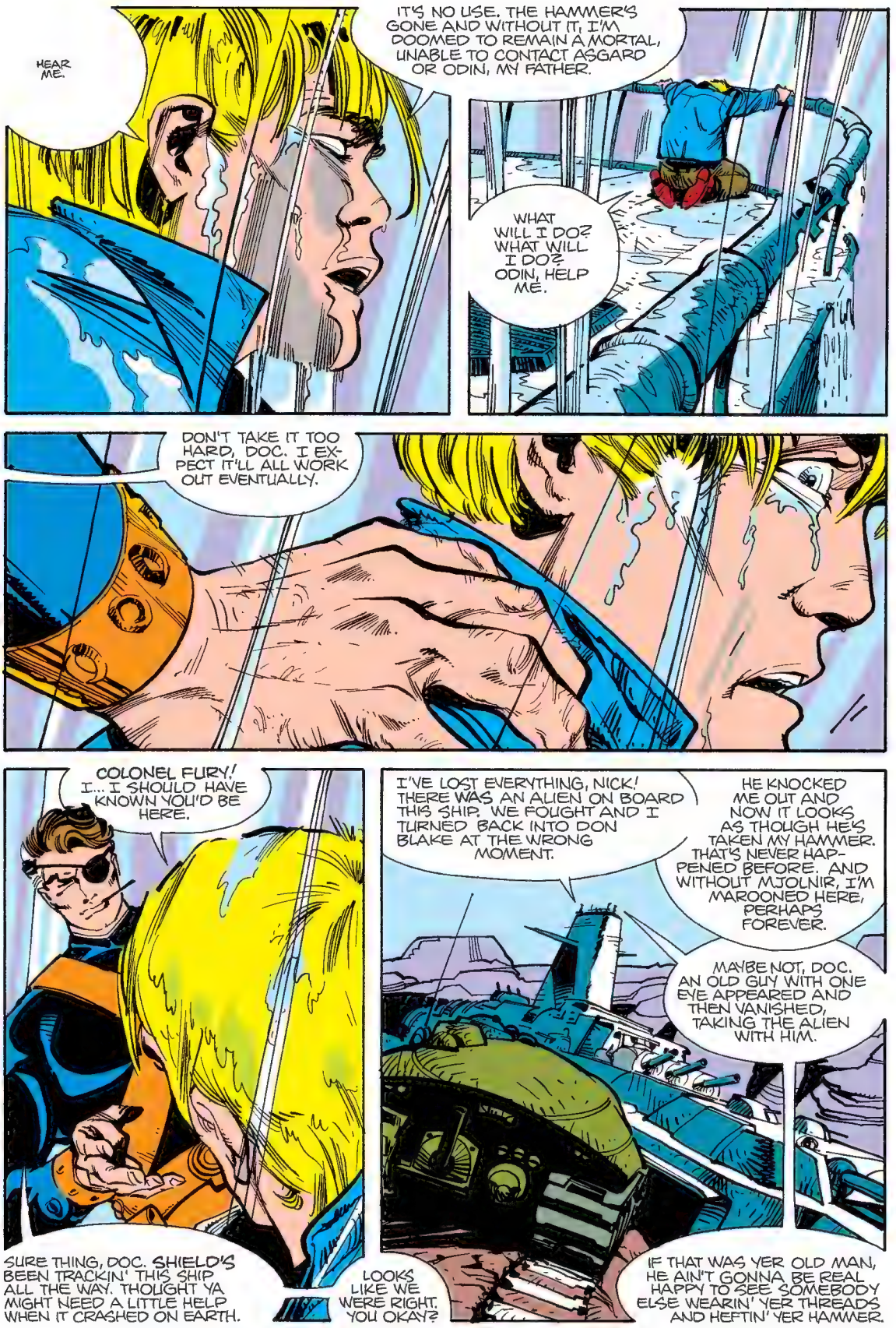
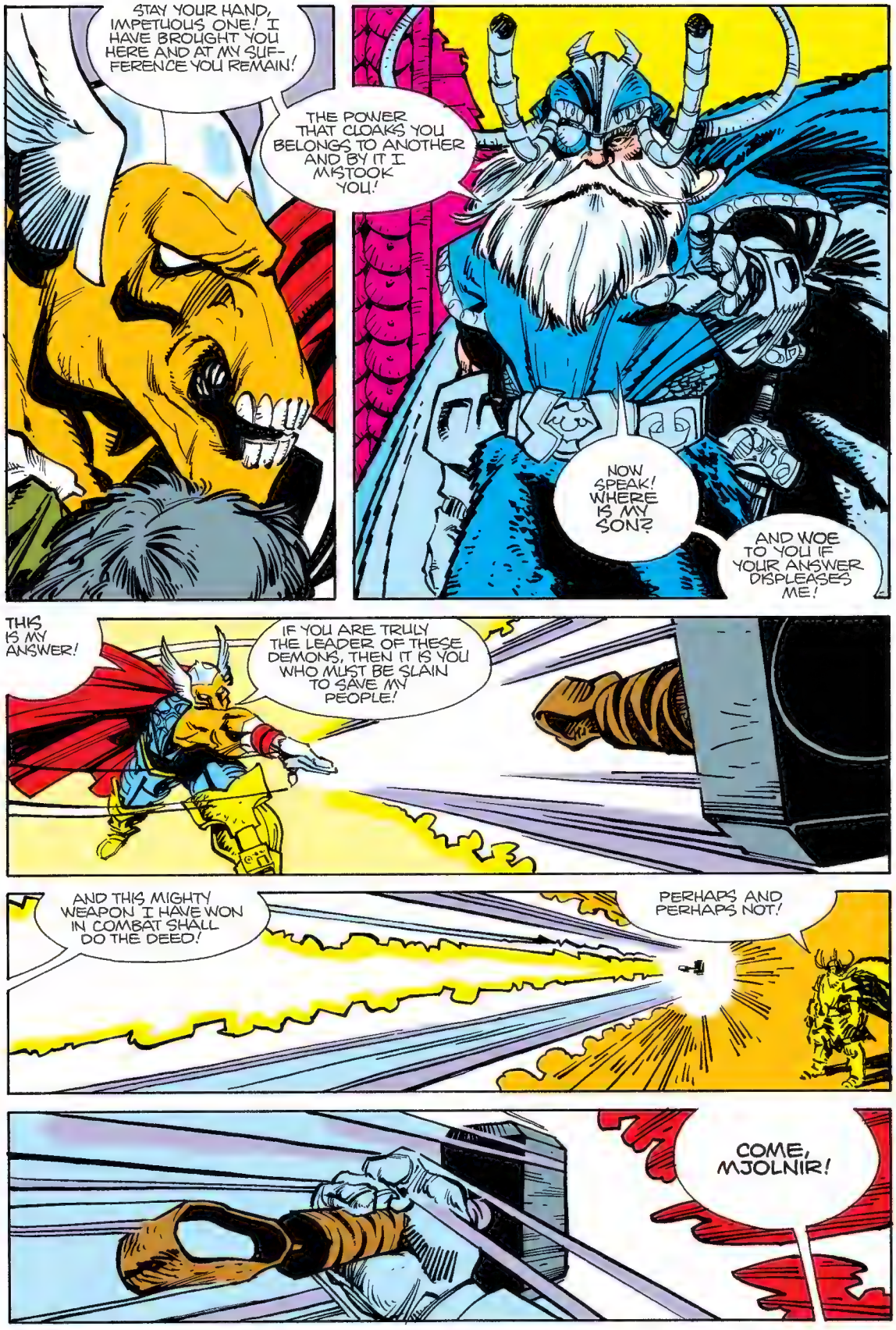
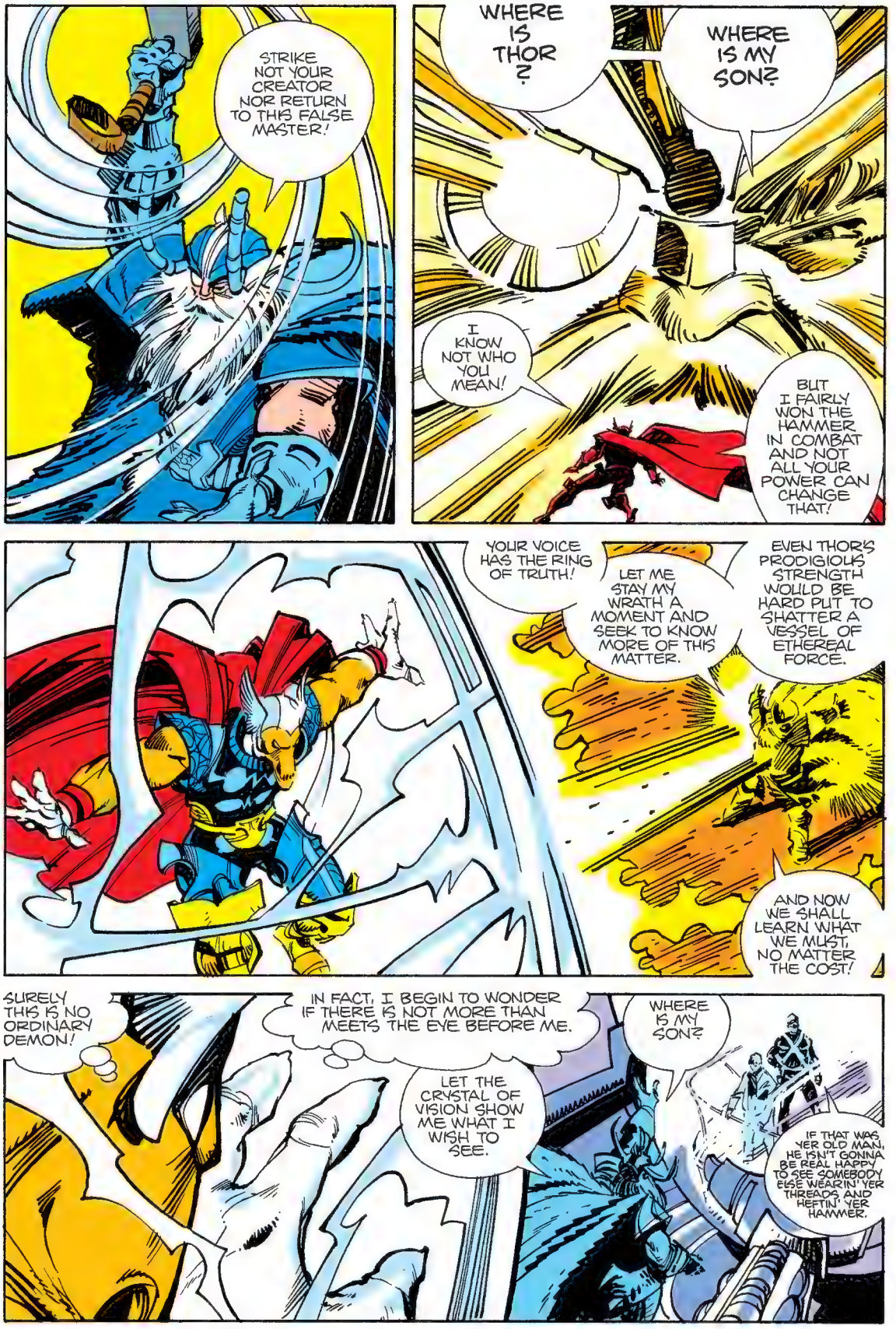
STAN LEE PRESENTS: the MIGHTY THOR®


ORDINARILY, DR. DONALD BLAKE CAN SIMPLY TAP HIS ENCHANTED CANE AND BE TRANSFORMED INTO THE MIGHTY THOR, AS THE CANE BECOMES HIS MIGHTY HAMMER, MJOLNIR.
BUT THE HAMMER HAS BEEN CARRIED OFF BY THOR'S RECENT FOE, BETA RAY BILL, WHO WAS HIMSELF TRANSFORMED BY THE MAGIC WEAPON...
...LEAVING A DESPERATE DONALD BLAKE STRANDED ON EARTH, TRAPPED WITHIN HIS MORTAL IDENTITY...
ODIN! FATHER ODIN!
HEAR ME!
A FOOL AND HIS HAMMER...

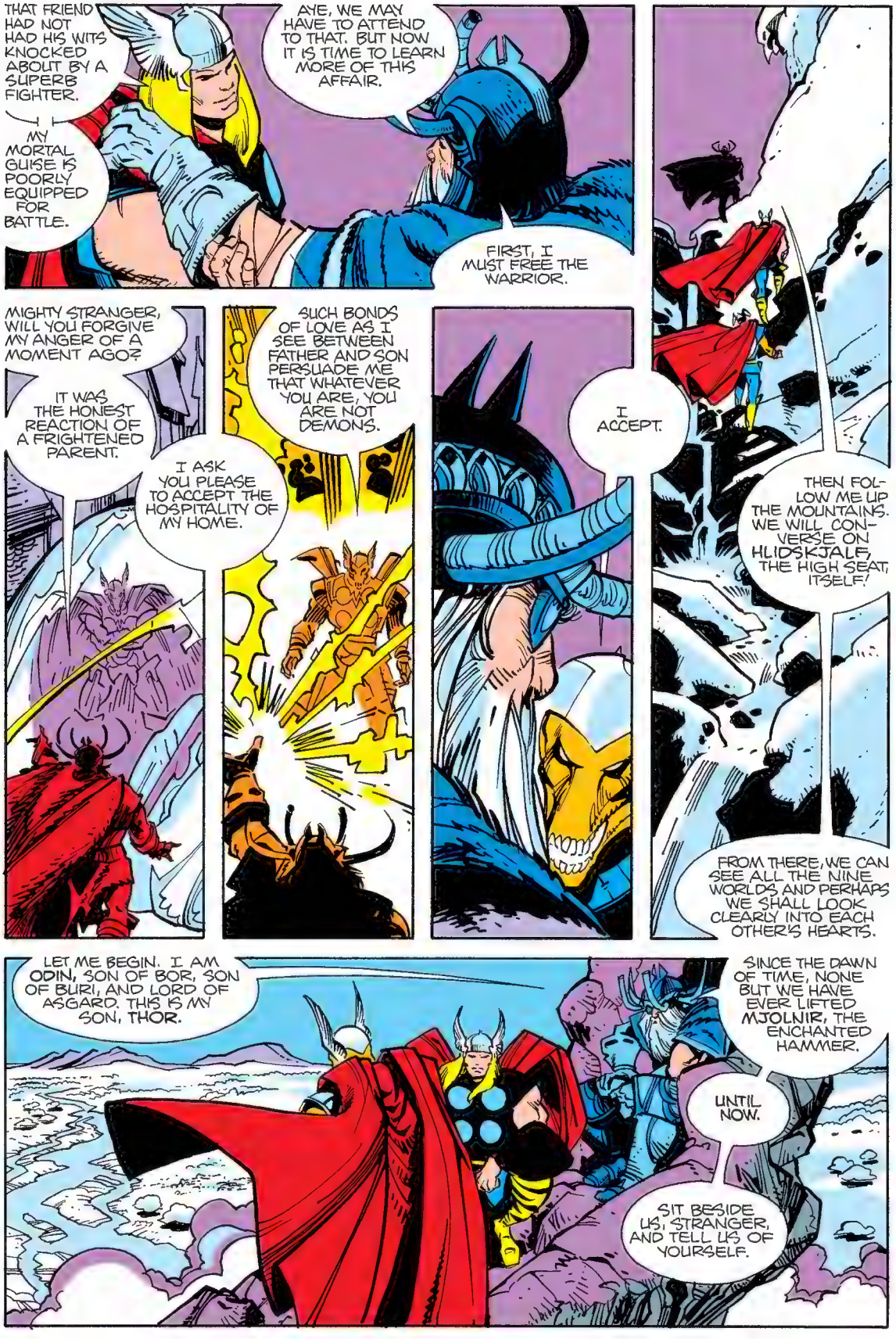

HEAR ME.
IT'S NO USE. THE HAMMER'S GONE AND WITHOUT IT, I'M DOOMED TO REMAIN A MORTAL, UNABLE TO CONTACT ASGARD OR ODIN, MY FATHER.
WHAT WILL I DO? WHAT WILL I DO? ODIN, HELP ME.
DON'T TAKE IT TOO HARD, DOC. I EXPECT IT'LL ALL WORK OUT EVENTUALLY.
COLONEL FURY! I... I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN YOU'D BE HERE.
SURE THING, DOC. SHIELD'S BEEN TRACKIN' THIS SHIP ALL THE WAY. THOUGHT YA MIGHT NEED A LITTLE HELP WHEN IT CRASHED ON EARTH.
LOOKS LIKE WE WERE RIGHT. YOU OKAY?
I'VE LOST EVERYTHING, NICK! THERE WAS AN ALIEN ON BOARD THIS SHIP. WE FOUGHT AND I TURNED BACK INTO DON BLAKE AT THE WRONG MOMENT.
HE KNOCKED ME OUT AND NOW IT LOOKS AS THOUGH HE'S TAKEN MY HAMMER. THAT'S NEVER HAPPENED BEFORE. AND WITHOUT MJOLNIR, I'M MAROONED HERE, PERHAPS FOREVER.
MAYBE NOT, DOC. AN OLD GUY WITH ONE EYE APPEARED AND THEN VANISHED, TAKING THE ALIEN WITH HIM.
IF THAT WAS YER OLD MAN, HE AIN'T GONNA BE REAL HAPPY TO SEE SOMEBODY ELSE WEARIN' YER THREADS AND HEFTIN' YER HAMMER.

ELSEWHERE IN ASGARD, LEGENDARY HOME OF THE NORSE GODS...
'TIS THOR!
LORD ODIN HAS RECALLED HIM FROM MIDGARD.*
TRULY ONLY HE CAN HELP US NOW IN THIS, OUR HOUR OF NEED.
*EARTH.
BACK, DEMONS! YOU'VE MORE TRICKS ABOUT YOU THAN I DREAMED OF BUT IT WILL AVAIL YOU NAUGHT!
BETA RAY BILL'S ONSLAUGHT IS DEADLY AND OVERWHELMING! BUT THE SHOCK OF THE ATTACK SCARCELY EQUALS THE ASGARDIAN'S SUBSEQUENT SURPRISE!
WHO... WHO ARE YOU THAT WEARS THE COSTUME AND CARRIES THE HAMMER OF THE MIGHTY THOR?
NO ASGARDIAN COULD EVEN LIFT THE ENCHANTED MALLET, LET ALONE DEFEAT THOR IN BATTLE.
IT IS NOT FOR YOU TO QUESTION ME! TELL ME RATHER WHERE THIS PLACE IS... AND WHO YOU DEMONS SERVE.


STAY YOUR HAND, IMPETUOUS ONE! I HAVE BROUGHT YOU HERE AND AT MY SUFFERENCE YOU REMAIN!
THE POWER THAT CLOAKS YOU BELONGS TO ANOTHER AND BY IT I MISTOOK YOU!
NOW SPEAK! WHERE IS MY SON?
AND WOE TO YOU IF YOUR ANSWER DISPLEASES ME!
THIS IS MY ANSWER!
IF YOU ARE TRULY THE LEADER OF THESE DEMONS, THEN IT IS YOU WHO MUST BE SLAIN TO SAVE MY PEOPLE!
AND THIS MIGHTY WEAPON I HAVE WON IN COMBAT SHALL DO THE DEED!
PERHAPS AND PERHAPS NOT!
COME, MJOLNIR!

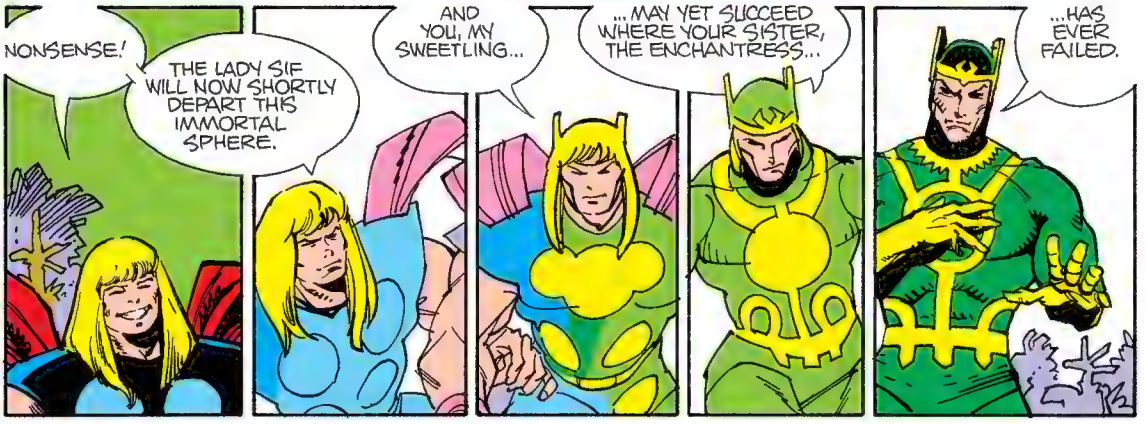

STRIKE NOT YOUR CREATOR NOR RETURN TO THIS FALSE MASTER!
WHERE IS THOR?
WHERE IS MY SON?
I KNOW NOT WHO YOU MEAN!
BUT I FAIRLY WON THE HAMMER IN COMBAT AND NOT ALL YOUR POWER CAN CHANGE THAT!
YOUR VOICE HAS THE RING OF TRUTH!
LET ME STAY MY WRATH A MOMENT AND SEEK TO KNOW MORE OF THIS MATTER.
EVEN THOR'S PRODIGIOUS STRENGTH WOULD BE HARD PUT TO SHATTER A VESSEL OF ETHEREAL FORCE.
AND NOW WE SHALL LEARN WHAT WE MUST, NO MATTER THE COST!
SURELY THIS IS NO ORDINARY DEMON!
IN FACT, I BEGIN TO WONDER IF THERE IS NOT MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE BEFORE ME.
LET THE CRYSTAL OF VISION SHOW ME WHAT I WISH TO SEE.
WHERE IS MY SON?
IF THAT WAS YER OLD MAN, HE ISN'T GONNA BE REAL HAPPY TO SEE SOMEBODY ELSE WEARIN' YER THREADS AND HEFTIN' YER HAMMER.

FACT IS, I'M SURPRISED HE HASN'T...
IS IT MY IMAGINATION OR IS IT GETTIN' DARKER?
I HOPE IT WASN'T SOMETHIN' I SAID.
BARROOM
YEOW! NOT AGAIN!
NOW DOC'S GONE, TOO. BROTHER, THIS IS GONNA MAKE ONE HECK OF A REPORT!
WELL, GOOD LUCK, BLAKE. I THINK YER GONNA NEED IT.
IT LOOKS LIKE IT'S STARTIN' TO RAIN AGAIN, TOO.
SWELL. DON'T THESE GUYS EVER TRAVEL IN DRY WEATHER?
AT THAT MOMENT, ON ASGARD...
FATHER!
WELCOME HOME, MY SON. HOW STANDS THY ZEST FOR ADVENTURE NOW?
UNABATED, MY LORD. THOUGH I CONFESS THAT A MOMENT AGO, I FEARED THAT PERHAPS ALL MY ADVENTURES WERE OVER.
AH, MY YOUTHFUL SON, DOES THIS MEAN THAT YOUR MORTAL FRIEND HAS MORE FAITH IN A ONE-EYED VISION THAN MY BOY HAS IN HIS OWN FATHER?


THAT FRIEND HAD NOT HAD HIS WITS KNOCKED ABOUT BY A SUPERB FIGHTER.
MY MORTAL GUISE IS POORLY EQUIPPED FOR BATTLE.
AYE, WE MAY HAVE TO ATTEND TO THAT. BUT NOW IT IS TIME TO LEARN MORE OF THIS AFFAIR.
FIRST, I MUST FREE THE WARRIOR.
MIGHTY STRANGER, WILL YOU FORGIVE MY ANGER OF A MOMENT AGO?
IT WAS THE HONEST REACTION OF A FRIGHTENED PARENT.
I ASK YOU PLEASE TO ACCEPT THE HOSPITALITY OF MY HOME.
SUCH BONDS OF LOVE AS I SEE BETWEEN FATHER AND SON PERSUADE ME THAT WHATEVER YOU ARE, YOU ARE NOT DEMONS.
I ACCEPT.
THEN FOLLOW ME UP THE MOUNTAINS. WE WILL CONVERSE ON HLIDSKJALF, THE HIGH SEAT, ITSELF!
FROM THERE, WE CAN SEE ALL THE NINE WORLDS AND PERHAPS WE SHALL LOOK CLEARLY INTO EACH OTHER'S HEARTS.
LET ME BEGIN. I AM ODIN, SON OF BOR, SON OF BURI, AND LORD OF ASGARD. THIS IS MY SON, THOR.
SINCE THE DAWN OF TIME, NONE BUT WE HAVE EVER LIFTED MJOLNIR, THE ENCHANTED HAMMER.
UNTIL NOW.
SIT BESIDE US, STRANGER, AND TELL US OF YOURSELF.

MEANWHILE, BELOW THE HIGH SEAT, AT THE GARDEN ENTRANCE TO ODIN'S NOBLE HALL, WE FIND THE LADY SIF...
MY BROTHER, HEIMDALL THE WATCHER, MAY BE RIGHT. ONLY ODIN HIMSELF CAN HELP ME EASE MY EMPTY HEART NOW THAT THOR AND I ARE NO LONGER PROMISED TO EACH OTHER.
WOULD THAT ODIN HAD NEVER GIVEN THOR HIS MORTAL IDENTITY SO LONG AGO. I STILL LOVE THE NOBLE WARRIOR BUT HIS HEART MAY EVER BE DIVIDED BETWEEN ASGARD AND MIDGARD.
AND THOUGH MY LOVE SURPASSES UNDERSTANDING, I CANNOT SHARE THOR'S JOY FOR EARTH.
BUT WHAT'S THIS I HEAR?
SURELY MY SENSES DECEIVE ME!
AH, LADY LORELEI, TO FEEL YOUR ARMS ENTWINED ABOUT ME, YOUR SWEET BREATH UPON MY FACE, YOUR LIPS PRESSED TO MINE... 'TIS ALL THAT I DESIRE.
FOR SUCH KISSES, I WOULD FORSAKE EVEN MIDGARD ITSELF!
I...UH...I... MILADY SIF?
SO.
THOUGH MY OWN BREATH IS LESS SWEET, MY LORD THOR, ACCEPT THIS PARTING KISS...
THE KISS OF A WARRIOR BORN AND NO SOFT PLAYTHING!

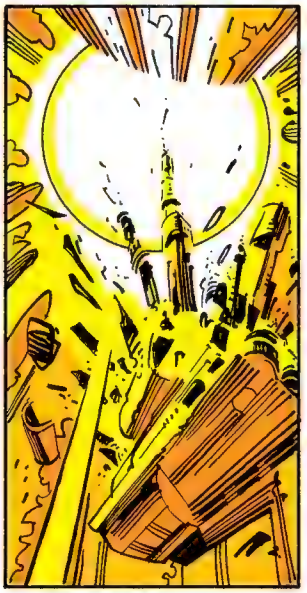
AS FOR YOU, YOU BAWD, I LEAVE THOR TO YOUR TENDER EMBRACES! BUT HAVE A CARE!
FALSE HEART ONCE IS FALSE HEART FOREVER!
SPUTTER SPUT
HAHAHA! WHAT A RARE JEST! A WONDERFUL FOLLY!
AH, LORELEI, I WOULD HOLD YOU IN MY ARMS FOREVER FOR SUCH SPORT AS THIS.
PERHAPS, MY LORD, I WOULD NOT HAVE UNDERTAKEN THIS JEST HAD I KNOWN BEFOREHAND THAT IT WOULD BE SO DANGEROUS!


NONSENSE!
THE LADY SIF WILL NOW SHORTLY DEPART THIS IMMORTAL SPHERE.
AND YOU, MY SWEETLING...
...MAY YET SUCCEED WHERE YOUR SISTER, THE ENCHANTRESS...
...HAS EVER FAILED.

BUT EVEN AS LOKI CHORTLES IN HIS GLEE, WE RETURN TO THE HIGH SEAT AND ITS OCCUPANTS...

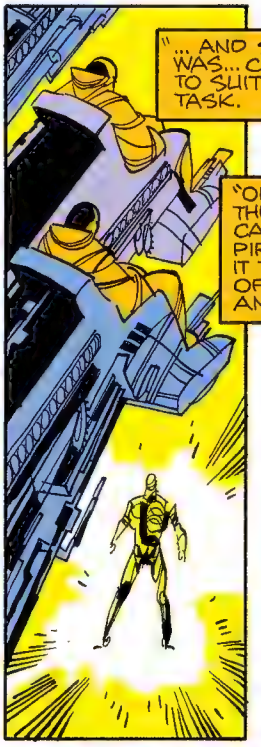
LISTEN WELL THEN, LORDS, AND I WILL TELL MY TALE, THE STORY OF BETA RAY BILL.
MINE IS AN ANCIENT AND NOBLE RACE THAT HAS LIVED IN THE HEART OF A GALAXY FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL.
WE BUILT OUR CITIES IN THE BURNING SKIES AND DANCED IN THE SUNLIGHT.

"FOR LONG AGES WE DWELT THERE IN HARMONY, UNTIL WITHOUT WARNING, THE CORE OF OUR GALAXY EXPLODED, DESTROYING MUCH OF OUR CIVILIZATION.



"THE SURVIVORS WERE FORCED TO FLEE FOR, AS TIME PASSED, THE REMAINING GALACTIC CORE GREW HOTTER THAN WE COULD WITHSTAND.

"I ALONE WAS CHOSEN BY OUR LEADERS TO BE THE GUARDIAN OF THE EXODUS...



"... AND SO I WAS... CHANGED TO SUIT MY TASK.

"OUR SCIENTISTS TOOK THE MOST FEROCIOUS CARNIVORE OF OUR EMPIRE AND BIO-ENGINEERED IT TO PRODUCE A WARRIOR OF SURPASSING SKILL AND STRENGTH.

"WHEN ALL WAS MADE READY, MY SOUL WAS FITTED TO THE BODY AND I BECAME THE PROTECTOR OF MY PEOPLE.

"I WAS GIVEN A WARSHIP TO RIDE, THE SKUTTLEBUTT, WHO HAS BECOME MY COMPANION... AND MY FRIEND.

"BUT WE HAD NOT FOOD ENOUGH FOR ALL OUR PEOPLE IN THE GREAT FLEET NECESSARY TO CARRY THEM TO SAFETY.

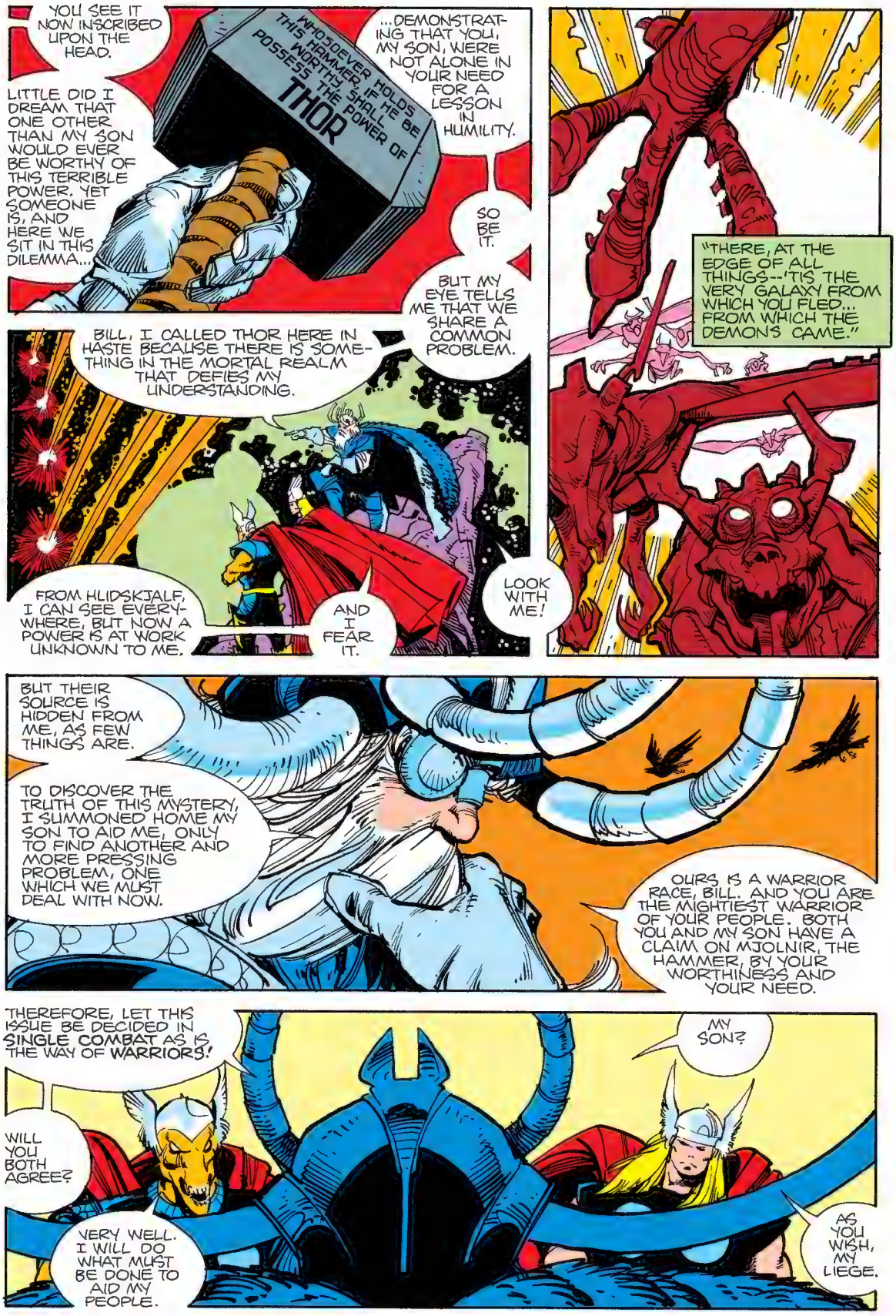
"SO THEY WERE LOCKED IN COLD-SLEEP, AND ON TEN THOUSAND SHIPS, WE FLED OUR ANCESTRAL HOME.

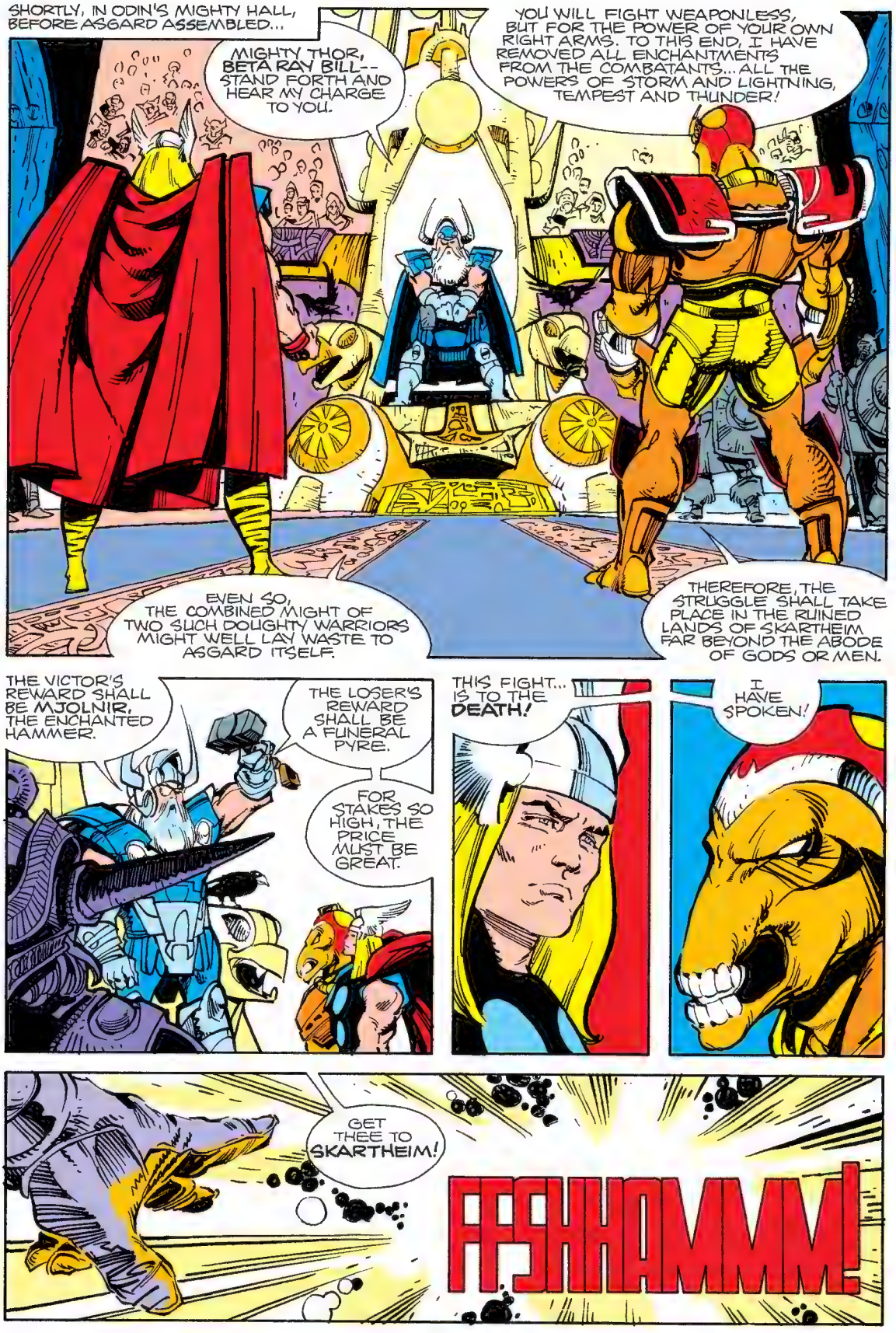
"IT WAS WELL THAT SKUTTLEBUTT AND I WERE PREPARED. FOR WE FOUND THAT OUR FLEET DID NOT TRAVEL ALONE.

"SCARCELY HAD WE LEFT THE BURNING REGIONS WHEN WE WERE ATTACKED BY A HOST OF **DEMONS** UNKNOWN TO US TILL THEN.

"THEY CAME OUT OF THE FIERY CORE HARD ON OUR HEELS AND HARRIED US AND DESTROYED THOSE THEY CAUGHT.

"SKUTTLEBUTT AND I FOUGHT THEM UNTIL OUR PEOPLE HAD DRAWN AWAY SAFELY. THEN WE FLED AND ESCAPED BUT THE DEMONS TURNED AND FOLLOWED US.
"I SPED ON AHEAD OF THE FLEET, SEARCHING FOR SANCTUARY AND FINDING NONE.
THE PURSUIT STILL GOES ON ACROSS COUNTLESS LIGHT-YEARS. THEY ARE SLOWLY OVERTAKING US BUT WE CANNOT FIND A HAVEN.
NOW I HAVE FOUND A WEAPON THAT MAY PROTECT MY PEOPLE FOR ALL TIME, AND I AM LOATHE TO GIVE IT UP.
ESPECIALLY AS I HAVE WON IT IN FAIR COMBAT.
WHAT?
I SAY THEE NAY, NOBLE WARRIOR.
IT WAS NOT THOR THOU DID DEFEAT BUT A MORTAL SHELL! I--!
BE STILL, MY SON. HE HAS A POINT.
YET, TRULY, MIGHTY BILL, THE COMBAT YOU SPEAK OF WAS NOT ENTIRELY FAIR.
IN THOSE DAYS, THOR WAS PROUD AND HEADSTRONG. I SOUGHT TO TEACH HIM THE WISDOM OF PATIENCE.
IN MY OWN PRIDE, I FASHIONED A MAGIC ABOUT THE HAMMER.
FOR MY SON FOUGHT UNDER THE HANDICAP OF A SPELL THAT I MYSELF CREATED MANY YEARS AGO, BOUND UP IN THIS VERY HAMMER.

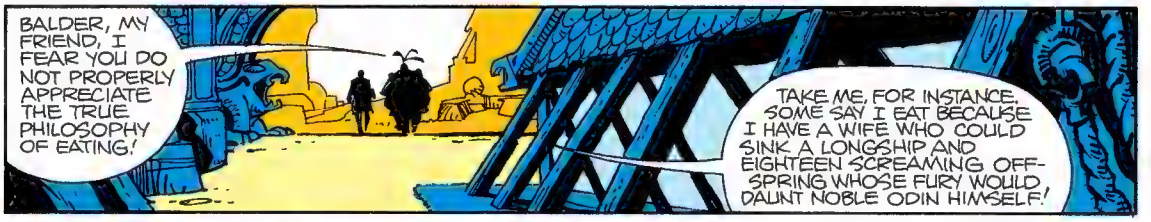

YOU SEE IT NOW INSCRIBED UPON THE HEAD.
WHOSOEVER HOLDS THIS HAMMER, IF HE BE WORTHY SHALL POSSESS THE POWER OF THOR
...DEMONSTRATING THAT YOU, MY SON, WERE NOT ALONE IN YOUR NEED FOR A LESSON IN HUMILITY.
LITTLE DID I DREAM THAT ONE OTHER THAN MY SON WOULD EVER BE WORTHY OF THIS TERRIBLE POWER. YET SOMEONE IS, AND HERE WE SIT IN THIS DILEMMA...
SO BE IT.
BUT MY EYE TELLS ME THAT WE SHARE A COMMON PROBLEM.
"THERE, AT THE EDGE OF ALL THINGS--'TIS THE VERY GALAXY FROM WHICH YOU FLED... FROM WHICH THE DEMONS CAME."
BILL, I CALLED THOR HERE IN HASTE BECAUSE THERE IS SOMETHING IN THE MORTAL REALM THAT DEFIES MY UNDERSTANDING.
FROM HLIDSKJALF, I CAN SEE EVERYWHERE, BUT NOW A POWER IS AT WORK UNKNOWN TO ME.
AND I FEAR IT.
LOOK WITH ME!
BUT THEIR SOURCE IS HIDDEN FROM ME, AS FEW THINGS ARE.
TO DISCOVER THE TRUTH OF THIS MYSTERY, I SUMMONED HOME MY SON TO AID ME, ONLY TO FIND ANOTHER AND MORE PRESSING PROBLEM, ONE WHICH WE MUST DEAL WITH NOW.
OURS IS A WARRIOR RACE, BILL. AND YOU ARE THE MIGHTIEST WARRIOR OF YOUR PEOPLE. BOTH YOU AND MY SON HAVE A CLAIM ON MJOLNIR, THE HAMMER, BY YOUR WORTHINESS AND YOUR NEED.
THEREFORE, LET THIS ISSUE BE DECIDED IN SINGLE COMBAT AS IS THE WAY OF WARRIORS!
MY SON?
WILL YOU BOTH AGREE?
VERY WELL. I WILL DO WHAT MUST BE DONE TO AID MY PEOPLE.
AS YOU WISH, MY LIEGE.

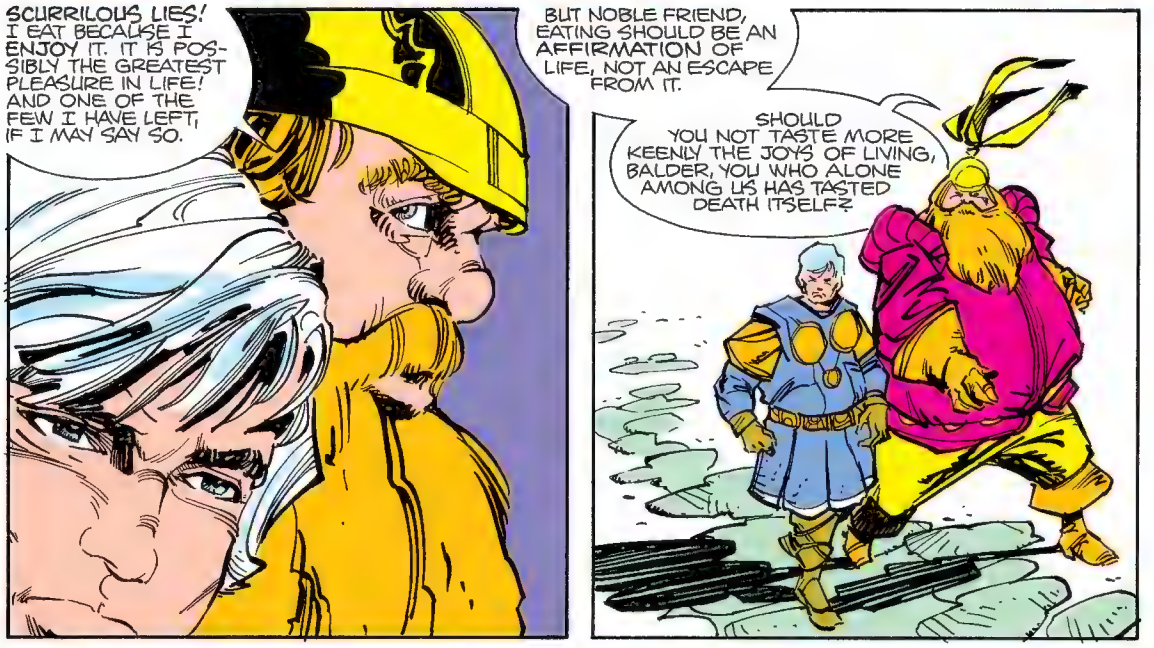

SHORTLY, IN ODIN'S MIGHTY HALL, BEFORE ASGARD ASSEMBLED...
MIGHTY THOR, BETA RAY BILL-- STAND FORTH AND HEAR MY CHARGE TO YOU.
YOU WILL FIGHT WEAPONLESS, BUT FOR THE POWER OF YOUR OWN RIGHT ARMS. TO THIS END, I HAVE REMOVED ALL ENCHANTMENTS FROM THE COMBATANTS... ALL THE POWERS OF STORM AND LIGHTNING, TEMPEST AND THUNDER!
EVEN SO, THE COMBINED MIGHT OF TWO SUCH DOUGHTY WARRIORS MIGHT WELL LAY WASTE TO ASGARD ITSELF.
THEREFORE, THE STRUGGLE SHALL TAKE PLACE IN THE RUINED LANDS OF SKARTHEIM FAR BEYOND THE ABODE OF GODS OR MEN.
THE VICTOR'S REWARD SHALL BE MJOLNIR, THE ENCHANTED HAMMER.
THE LOSER'S REWARD SHALL BE A FUNERAL PYRE.
FOR STAKES SO HIGH, THE PRICE MUST BE GREAT.
THIS FIGHT... IS TO THE DEATH!
I HAVE SPOKEN!
GET THEE TO SKARTHEIM!
FFSHHAMMM!

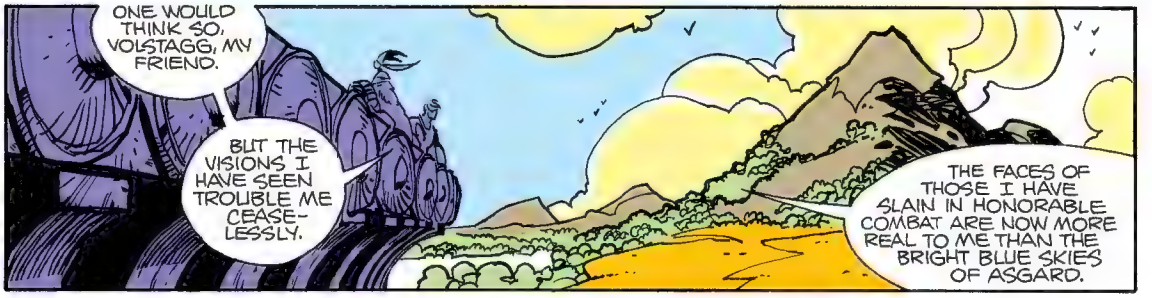
AN INSTANT LATER, THOR MATERIALIZES ABOVE A FORBIDDING LANDSCAPE...
SKARTHEIM! WHERE EVEN GODS MAY PERISH!
MY FATHER SURELY HAS ENTRUSTED OUR FATES TO THE NORNS* THEMSELVES!
*THE THREE FATES!
BUT I DO NOT SEE MY OPPONENT.
NO DOUBT LORD ODIN CAUSED HIM TO APPEAR ELSEWHERE IN THIS DANGEROUS REALM.
I FEEL THE HEAT OF THE EARTH ITSELF!
THE VERY GROUND ERUPTS BENEATH MY FEET!
I MUST TAKE MYSELF TO A SAFER PERCH!
UHGG!
NAY, THUNDER GOD, THERE IS NO SAFETY IN ALL THIS LAND AS LONG AS ONE OF US REMAINS ALIVE!

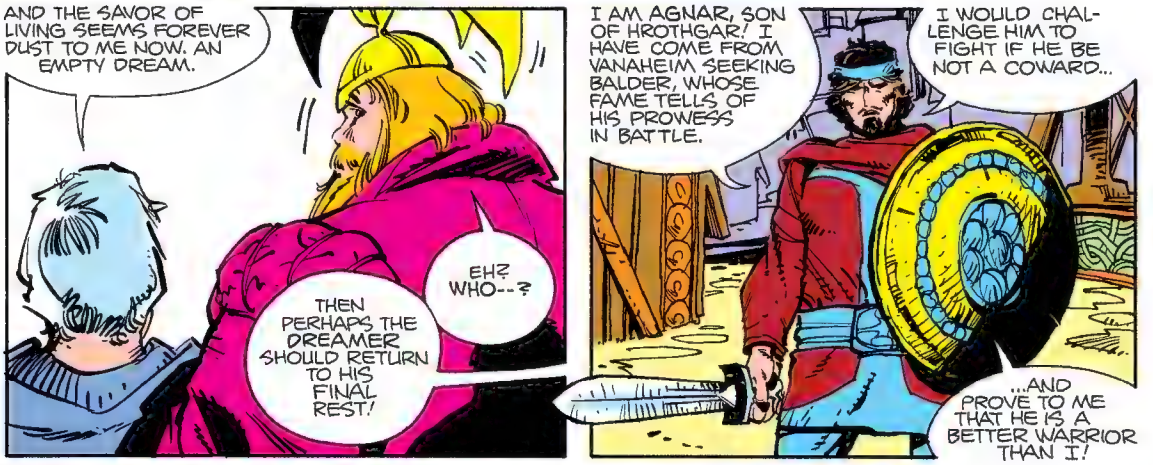
RASH WARRIOR! SO BOOTLESS AN ATTACK UPON A PRINCE OF ASGARD WILL SCARCELY WIN YOU THE HAMMER!
NOT EVEN WHEN THE PRINCE WILL CUSHION OUR DEADLY PLUNGE FROM THE CLIFFS WITH HIS OWN BODY?
RAKKS
WHAT? DO YOU SUPPOSE A SIMPLE FALL WILL INJURE ME? THOUGH I AM WITHOUT THE GODLY POWER OF MY HERITAGE, I DO POSSESS THE STRENGTH THAT IS MY BIRTHRIGHT!
STILL I AM STRONG ENOUGH TO GIVE THEE PAUSE.
BUT PAUSE IS NOT A VICTORY, THUNDERER!
AND VICTORY WILL SOON BE MINE!
THOUGH I DO GRIEVE TO DO THIS DEED, YOUR OWN FATHER HAS COMMANDED IT.
HIS WILL BE DONE!

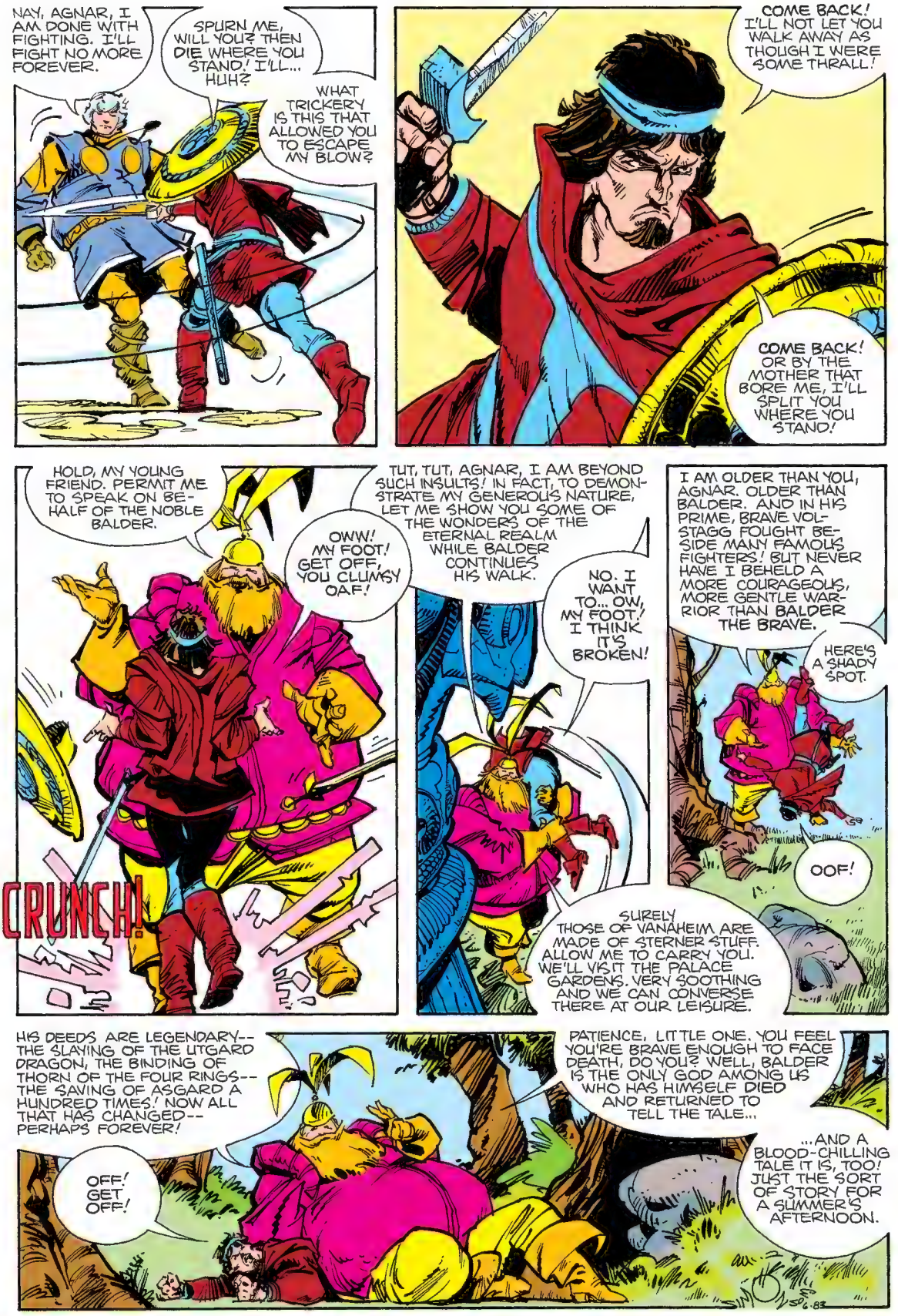
NOT EVERYONE IN ASGARD, HOWEVER, IS ATTENDING THE MIGHTY HALL OF ODIN TO WITNESS THIS TITANIC STRUGGLE. ELSEWHERE IN THE DESERTED BOULEVARDS OF THE GOLDEN CITY...


BALDER, MY FRIEND, I FEAR YOU DO NOT PROPERLY APPRECIATE THE TRUE PHILOSOPHY OF EATING!
TAKE ME, FOR INSTANCE. SOME SAY I EAT BECAUSE I HAVE A WIFE WHO COULD SINK A LONGSHIP AND EIGHTEEN SCREAMING OFF-SPRING WHOSE FURY WOULD DAUNT NOBLE ODIN HIMSELF!


SCURRILOUS LIES! I EAT BECAUSE I ENJOY IT. IT IS POSSIBLY THE GREATEST PLEASURE IN LIFE! AND ONE OF THE FEW I HAVE LEFT, IF I MAY SAY SO.
BUT NOBLE FRIEND, EATING SHOULD BE AN AFFIRMATION OF LIFE, NOT AN ESCAPE FROM IT.
SHOULD YOU NOT TASTE MORE KEENLY THE JOYS OF LIVING, BALDER, YOU WHO ALONE AMONG US HAS TASTED DEATH ITSELF?

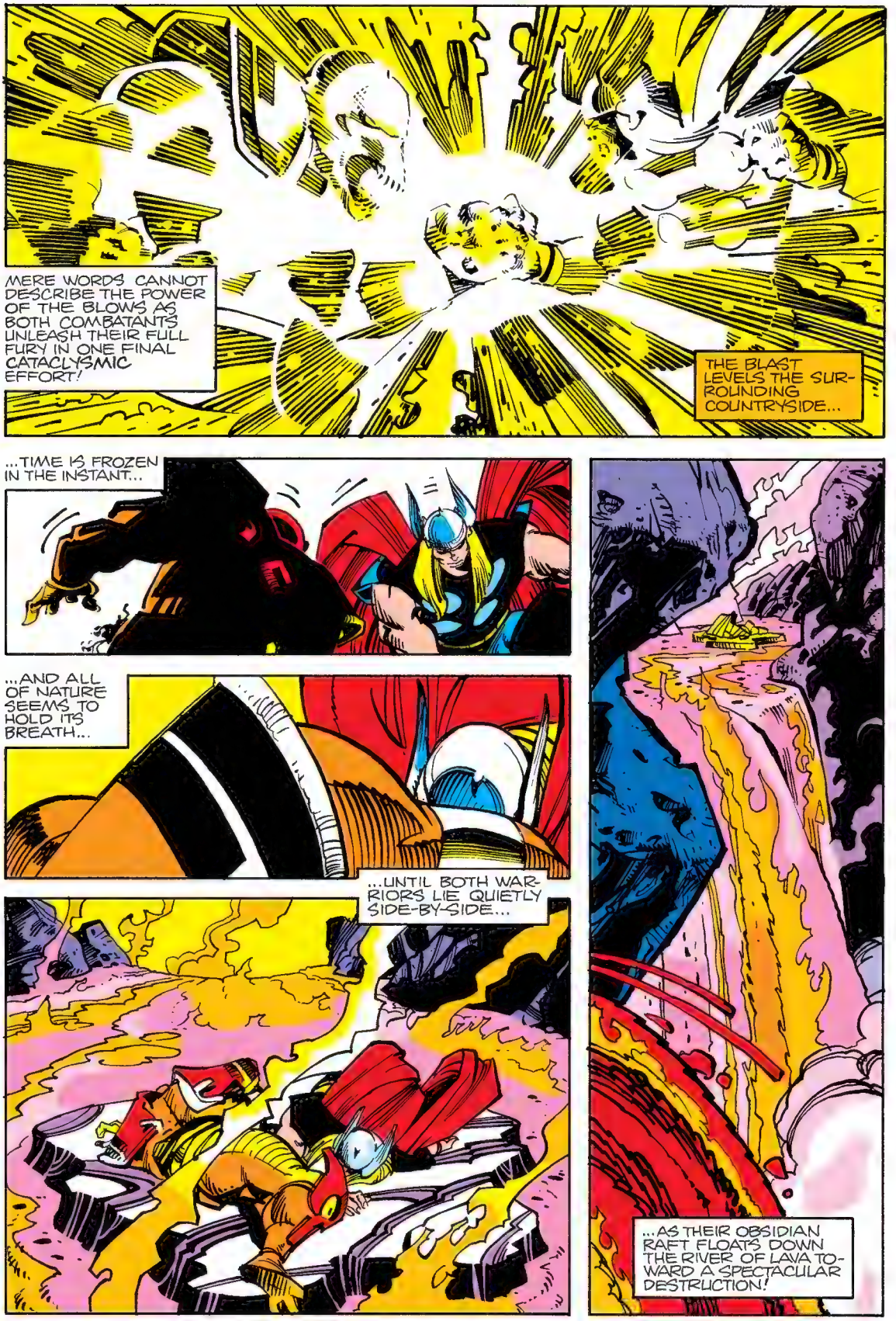

ONE WOULD THINK SO, VOLSTAGG, MY FRIEND.
BUT THE VISIONS I HAVE SEEN TROUBLE ME CEASELESSLY.
THE FACES OF THOSE I HAVE SLAIN IN HONORABLE COMBAT ARE NOW MORE REAL TO ME THAN THE BRIGHT BLUE SKIES OF ASGARD.

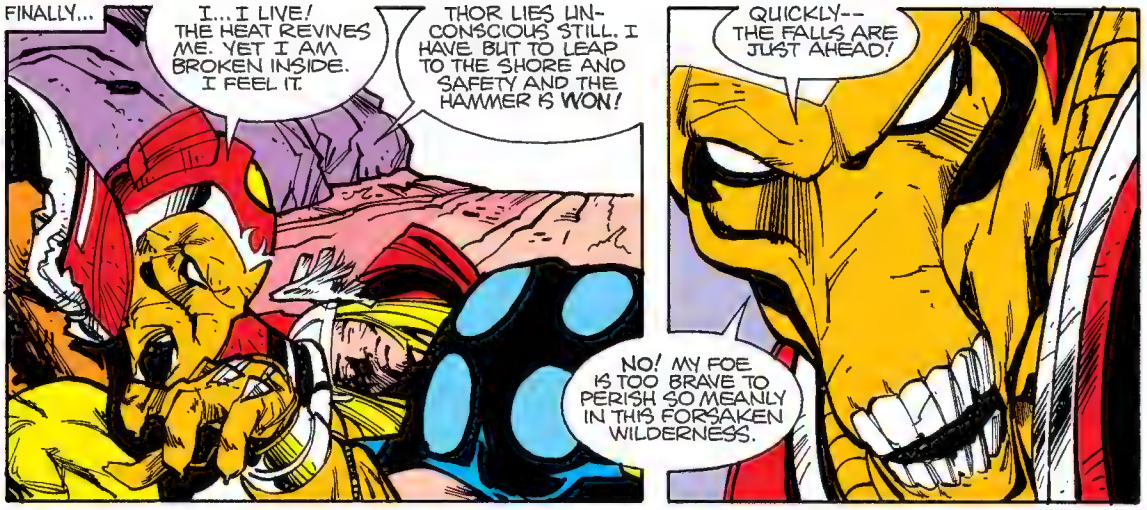

AND THE SAVOR OF LIVING SEEMS FOREVER DUST TO ME NOW. AN EMPTY DREAM.
EH? WHO--?
THEN PERHAPS THE DREAMER SHOULD RETURN TO HIS FINAL REST!
I AM AGNAR, SON OF HROTHGAR! I HAVE COME FROM VANAHEIM SEEKING BALDER, WHOSE FAME TELLS OF HIS PROWESS IN BATTLE.
I WOULD CHALLENGE HIM TO FIGHT IF HE BE NOT A COWARD...
...AND PROVE TO ME THAT HE IS A BETTER WARRIOR THAN I!

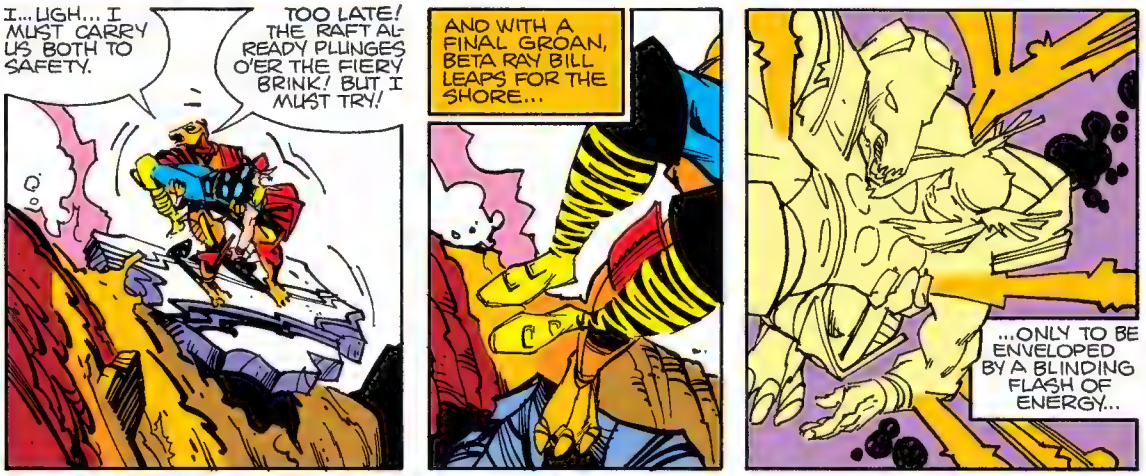

NAY, AGNAR, I AM DONE WITH FIGHTING. I'LL FIGHT NO MORE FOREVER.
SPURN ME, WILL YOU? THEN DIE WHERE YOU STAND! I'LL... HUH?
WHAT TRICKERY IS THIS THAT ALLOWED YOU TO ESCAPE MY BLOW?
COME BACK! I'LL NOT LET YOU WALK AWAY AS THOUGH I WERE SOME THRALL!
COME BACK! OR BY THE MOTHER THAT BORE ME, I'LL SPLIT YOU WHERE YOU STAND!
HOLD, MY YOUNG FRIEND. PERMIT ME TO SPEAK ON BEHALF OF THE NOBLE BALDER.
OWW! MY FOOT! GET OFF, YOU CLUMSY OAF!
CRUNCH!
TUT, TUT, AGNAR, I AM BEYOND SUCH INSULTS! IN FACT, TO DEMONSTRATE MY GENEROUS NATURE, LET ME SHOW YOU SOME OF THE WONDERS OF THE ETERNAL REALM WHILE BALDER CONTINUES HIS WALK.
NO. I WANT TO... OW, MY FOOT! I THINK IT'S BROKEN!
I AM OLDER THAN YOU, AGNAR. OLDER THAN BALDER. AND IN HIS PRIME, BRAVE VOLSTAGG FOUGHT BESIDE MANY FAMOUS FIGHTERS! BUT NEVER HAVE I BEHELD A MORE COURAGEOUS, MORE GENTLE WARRIOR THAN BALDER THE BRAVE.
HERE'S A SHADY SPOT.
OOF!
SURELY THOSE OF VANAHEIM ARE MADE OF STERNER STUFF. ALLOW ME TO CARRY YOU. WE'LL VISIT THE PALACE GARDENS. VERY SOOTHING AND WE CAN CONVERSE THERE AT OUR LEISURE.
HIS DEEDS ARE LEGENDARY--THE SLAYING OF THE UTGARD DRAGON, THE BINDING OF THORN OF THE FOUR RINGS--THE SAVING OF ASGARD A HUNDRED TIMES! NOW ALL THAT HAS CHANGED--PERHAPS FOREVER!
OFF! GET OFF!
PATIENCE, LITTLE ONE. YOU FEEL YOU'RE BRAVE ENOUGH TO FACE DEATH, DO YOU? WELL, BALDER IS THE ONLY GOD AMONG US WHO HAS HIMSELF DIED AND RETURNED TO TELL THE TALE...
...AND A BLOOD-CHILLING TALE IT IS, TOO! JUST THE SORT OF STORY FOR A SUMMER'S AFTERNOON.

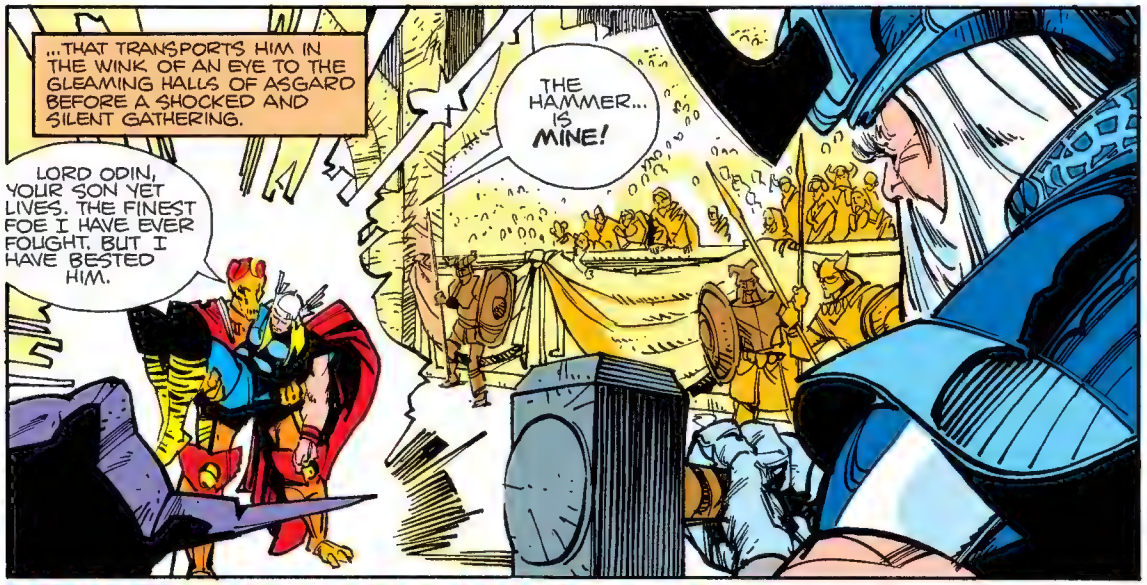
IT IS, HOWEVER, A TALE WE WILL HEAR ANOTHER TIME, FOR IN THE REMOTE LAND OF SKARTHEIM, WE FIND...
BACK, WARRIOR! THE HAMMER IS NOT YET THINE!
NEVER BEFORE HAVE I FOUGHT ONE SO WORTHY OR NOBLE! BUT IF I FAIL...
...WHAT OF MY GUARDIANSHIP OF EARTH? WHO SHALL BE HER CHAMPION IN TIME OF NEED?
NEITHER HERO SURRENDERS AN INCH AS THE BATTLE RAGES ACROSS THE ANCIENT LAND, TEARING THE VERY MOUNTAINS FROM THEIR ROOTS UNTIL...
SHAKK!!!
I SENSE THAT MY FOE IS TIRING EVEN AS I! THE MOMENT OF DECISION IS UPON US!
WILL THE THUNDER GOD NEVER BREAK? AGAIN HE LEAPS TO DO BATTLE WITH UNDIMINISHED FERVOR!
BUT NOW, HE HAS LEFT HIMSELF OPEN...
...FOR THIS!
KA-BHTHOOM!
BY THE BRISTLING BEARD OF ODIN! HE HAS SHATTERED THE HILLSIDE ITSELF TO CREATE A RAIN OF BOULDERS!
I CANNOT CHANGE MY DIRECTION IN TIME-- UHH!
TRULY HIS STRENGTH IS BEYOND COMPREHENSION!

STILL, I AM PROVIDED WITH A WEAPON THAT MAY SERVE ME AS WELL AS THE HAMMER OVER WHICH WE FIGHT!
FOR THIS ROCK, HURLED WITH ALL MY STRENGTH, MAY YET PROVE TO BE MY FOE'S DOWNFALL.
BTHOUUM!
I'M FALLING INTO THE RIVER OF LAVA! CAN THIS BE THE END OF MY QUEST?
BUT WAIT! THERE! THAT RAFT OF OBSIDIAN! IF ONLY I CAN TWIST MYSELF AROUND IN TIME--!
SAVED! YET EVEN NOW, MY FOE LEAPS UPON ME! SURELY, I MUST GIRD MYSELF, FOR THE SUPREME MOMENT IS AT HAND!


MERE WORDS CANNOT DESCRIBE THE POWER OF THE BLOWS AS BOTH COMBATANTS UNLEASH THEIR FULL FURY IN ONE FINAL CATACLYSMIC EFFORT!
THE BLAST LEVELS THE SURROUNDING COUNTRYSIDE...
...TIME IS FROZEN IN THE INSTANT...
...AND ALL OF NATURE SEEMS TO HOLD ITS BREATH...
...UNTIL BOTH WARRIORS LIE QUIETLY SIDE-BY-SIDE...
...AS THEIR OBSIDIAN RAFT FLOATS DOWN THE RIVER OF LAVA TOWARD A SPECTACULAR DESTRUCTION!

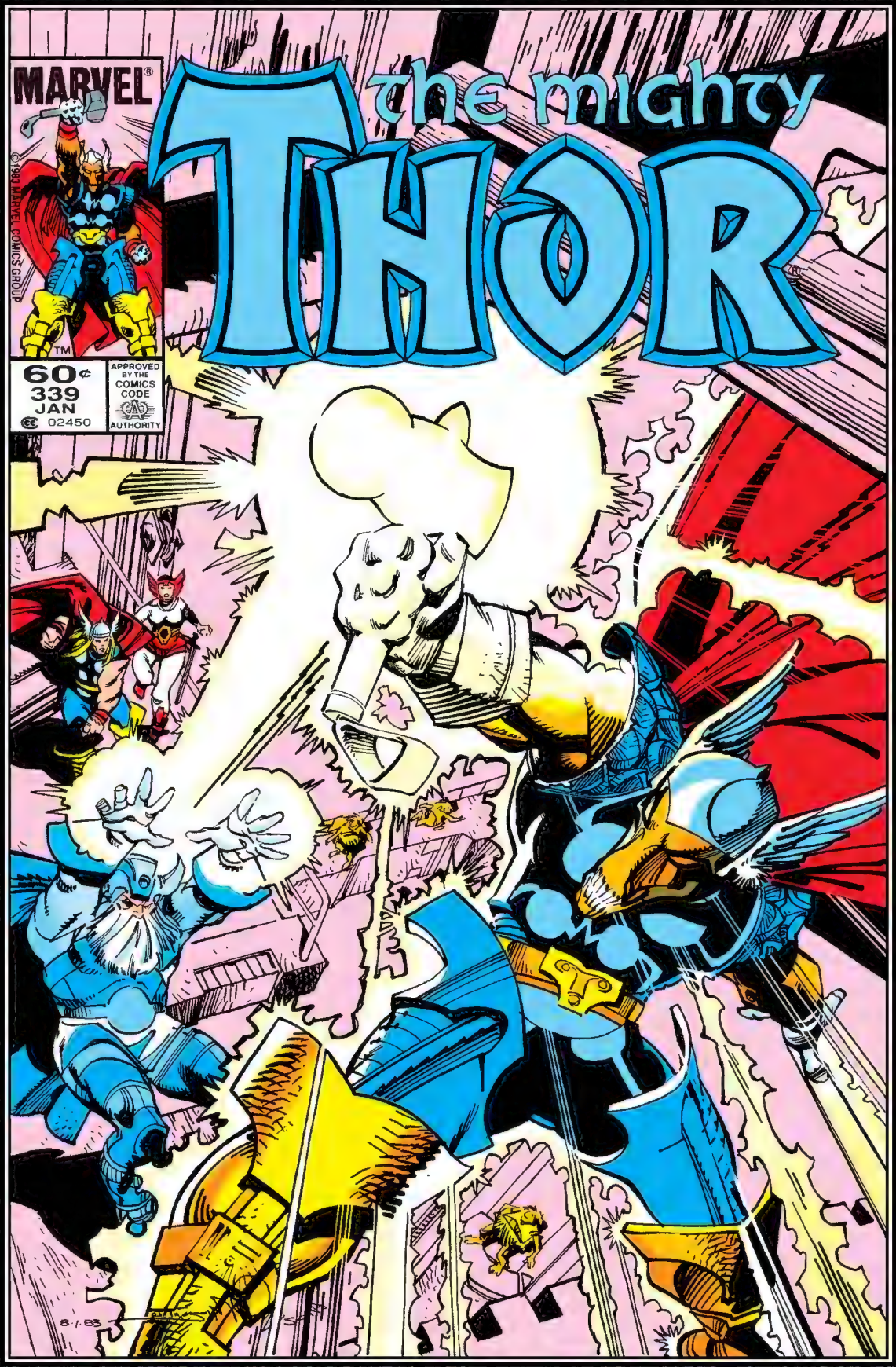

FINALLY...
I... I LIVE! THE HEAT REVIVES ME. YET I AM BROKEN INSIDE. I FEEL IT.
THOR LIES UNCONSCIOUS STILL. I HAVE BUT TO LEAP TO THE SHORE AND SAFETY AND THE HAMMER IS WON!
QUICKLY-- THE FALLS ARE JUST AHEAD!
NO! MY FOE IS TOO BRAVE TO PERISH SO MEANLY IN THIS FORSAKEN WILDERNESS.


I... UGH... I MUST CARRY US BOTH TO SAFETY.
TOO LATE! THE RAFT ALREADY PLUNGES O'ER THE FIERY BRINK! BUT I MUST TRY!
AND WITH A FINAL GROAN, BETA RAY BILL LEAPS FOR THE SHORE...
...ONLY TO BE ENVELOPED BY A BLINDING FLASH OF ENERGY...


...THAT TRANSPORTS HIM IN THE WINK OF AN EYE TO THE GLEAMING HALLS OF ASGARD BEFORE A SHOCKED AND SILENT GATHERING.
LORD ODIN, YOUR SON YET LIVES. THE FINEST FOE I HAVE EVER FOUGHT. BUT I HAVE BESTED HIM.
THE HAMMER... IS MINE!

NEXT: SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW...!

BETTER STOCK UP ON COPIES, KIDS! THIS ONE'LL BE A COLLECTOR'S ITEM FOR SURE!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the mighty
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STAN LEE PRESENTS: the MIGHTY THOR®

MOMENTS AGO, **BETA RAY BILL**, A BIONIC ALIEN, BESTED THE MIGHTY THOR IN SINGLE COMBAT AND SO WON THE RIGHT TO POSSESS THOR'S ENCHANTED HAMMER, **MJOLNIR**.*

BUT EVEN AS HE ANNOUNCES HIS VICTORY BEFORE THE STUNNED ASGARDIANS...

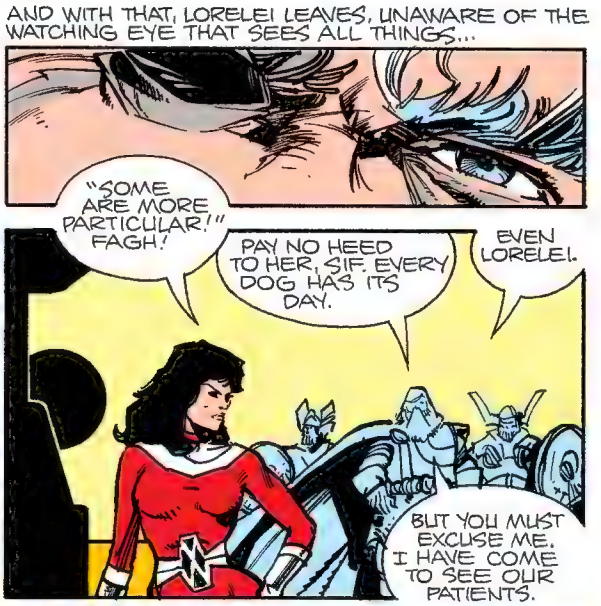
SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW...

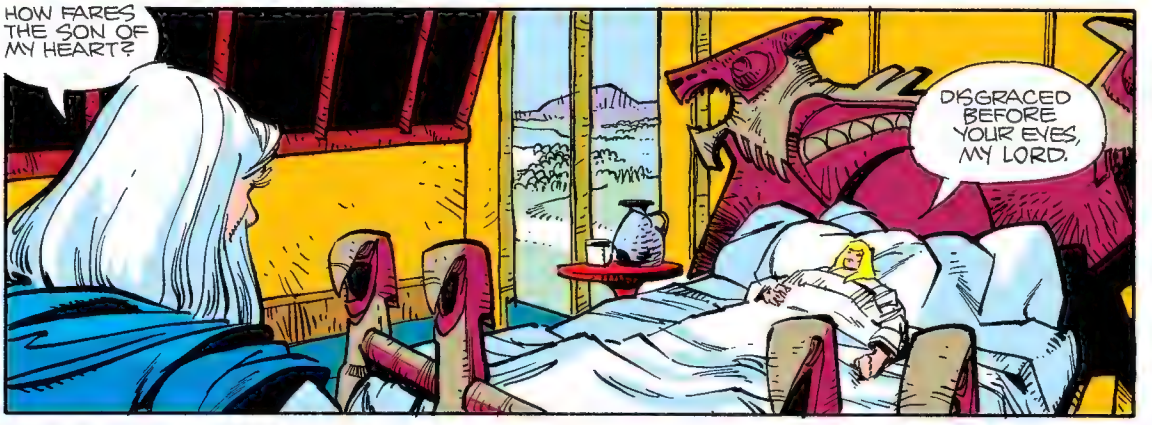
*AS SEEN IN OUR LAST COUPLE OF ISSUES.

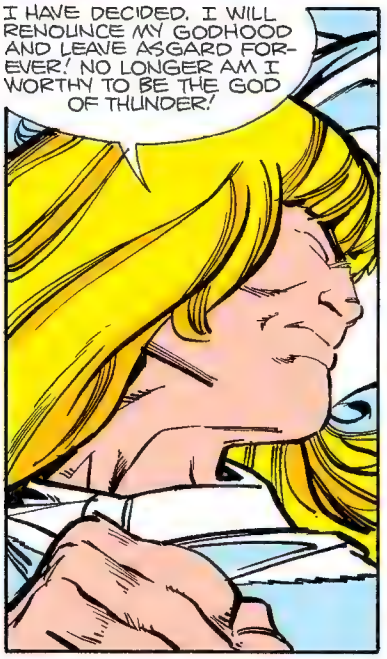
ART AND STORY: **WALTER SIMONSON** • LETTERING: **JOHN WORKMAN, JR.** • COLORS: **GEORGE ROUSSOS**
EDITING: **MIKE CARLIN** • EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: **JIM SHOOTER**

...AND FOR A LONG MOMENT, THERE IS SILENCE!
AROUSE YOURSELVES! LET THE IMPERIAL GUARD CARRY BOTH COMBATANTS TO THE HOUSE OF HEALING WITHOUT DELAY! AND BID THE ROYAL PHYSICIANS APPLY ALL THEIR ARTS!
THESE BRAVE WARRIORS MUST NOT PERISH!
BUT THOUGH THE ARMS OF HELA, THE DEATH GODDESS, BECKON TO EACH, NEITHER THOR NOR BETA RAY BILL IS DESTINED TO SURRENDER TO HER EMBRACE THIS DAY.
FOR THE SKILLS OF ODIN'S PHYSICIANS ARE UNMATCHED IN ALL THE NINE WORLDS.
STILL, THE HEROES' HURTS ARE GRIEVOUS AND EACH RESTS QUIETLY UNDER THE WATCHFUL (AND CURIOUS) EYES OF THEIR ATTENDANTS.
THE ALIEN SLEEPS PEACEFULLY.
BUT HE IS A STRANGE MIXTURE OF STRENGTH AND SORROW. THOUGH HE HAS WON THE HAMMER, HE TAKES NO JOY IN HIS VICTORY.
THEY SAY BILL REGAINS HIS STRENGTH AS QUICKLY AS THE MIGHTY THOR. DO YOU SUPPOSE HE WILL REMAIN LONG IN ASGARD?
I FOR ONE WOULD WOULD BE INTERESTED TO LEARN JUST HOW MECHANICAL HE REALLY IS.
WELL, I FOR ONE COULD CARE LESS. I'VE SEEN HIM...
...AND HE'S REPULSIVE!
I'D SOONER KISS A DOG THAN BE IN THE SAME ROOM WITH HIM!
RECALLING SOME PAST TRIUMPH, LORELEI?
THOR IS NO DOG, BUT THE HANDSOMEST GOD IN ALL ASGARD, LADY SIF. AND AFTER THIS DEFEAT, HE MAY WELCOME SUCH COMFORT AS ONLY I CAN GIVE.

HANDSOME IS AS HANDSOME DOES. BILL HAS LIFTED THE HAMMER AND FOUGHT AGAINST THOR AS NO ONE EVER HAS BEFORE. TO SEE LESS THAN THAT IS TO MISTAKE HIM.
THEN PERHAPS YOU SHOULD EMBRACE THE ALIEN! HE MIGHT WELCOME SUCH COMFORT AS YOU COULD GIVE.
SOME, HOWEVER, ARE MORE PARTICULAR!


AND WITH THAT, LORELEI LEAVES, UNAWARE OF THE WATCHING EYE THAT SEES ALL THINGS...
"SOME ARE MORE PARTICULAR!" FAGH!
PAY NO HEED TO HER, SIF. EVERY DOG HAS ITS DAY.
EVEN LORELEI.
BUT YOU MUST EXCUSE ME. I HAVE COME TO SEE OUR PATIENTS.


HOW FARES THE SON OF MY HEART?
DISGRACED BEFORE YOUR EYES, MY LORD.


I HAVE DECIDED. I WILL RENOUNCE MY GODHOOD AND LEAVE ASGARD FOREVER! NO LONGER AM I WORTHY TO BE THE GOD OF THUNDER!

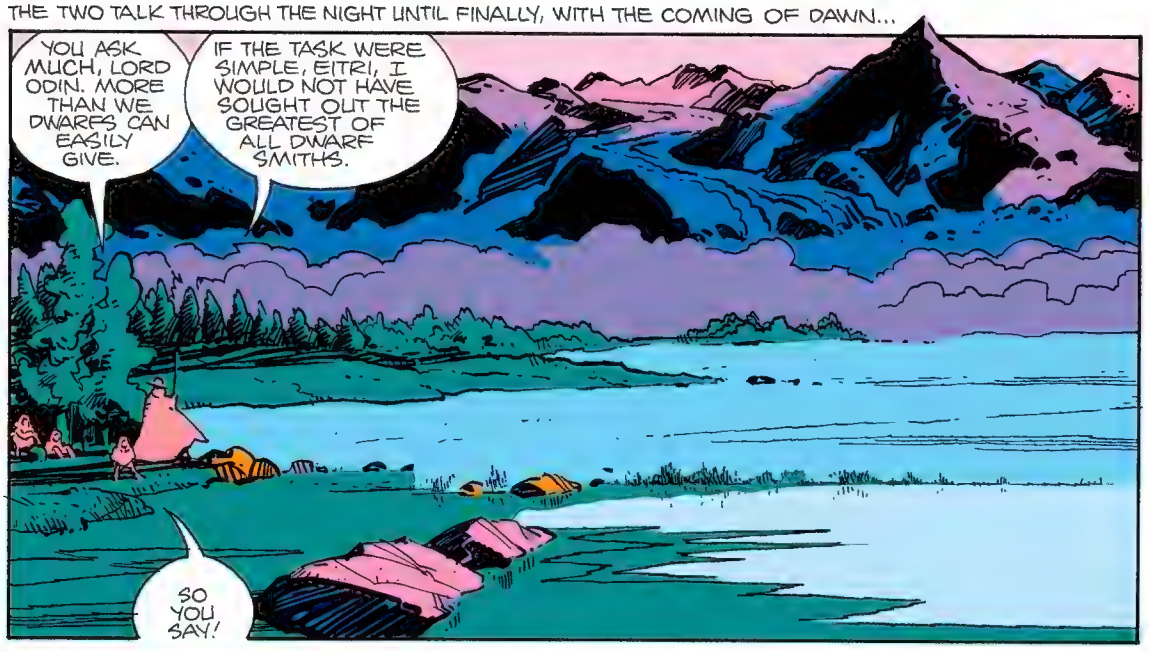
YES, WELL... WE SHALL SEE. I THINK I OUGHT TO SPEAK WITH BILL.
HE IS NOT HAPPY ABOUT THE OUTCOME OF THIS BATTLE EITHER, I UNDERSTAND.
PERHAPS DISCUSSION MAY BE ABLE TO HELP US WHERE BRUTE STRENGTH SEEMS TO HAVE FAILED.

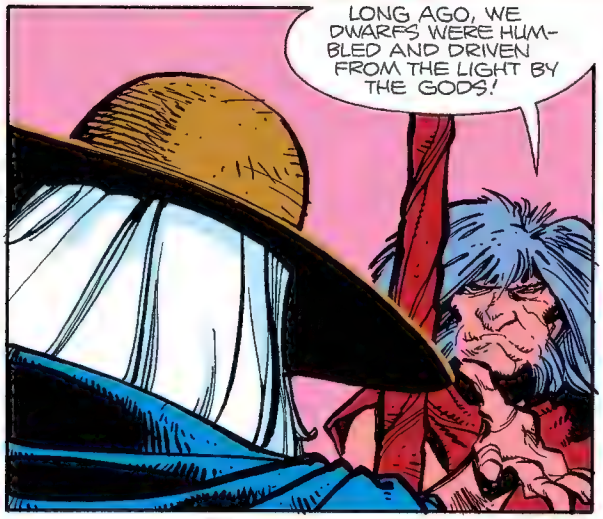
AS YOU WISH, FATHER. BUT TALKING WILL NOT CHANGE THE PAST.
ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE, MY SON.
MY MIND IS MADE UP. WHEN I AM WELL, I SHALL DEPART AND JOURNEY AMONG THE STARS.

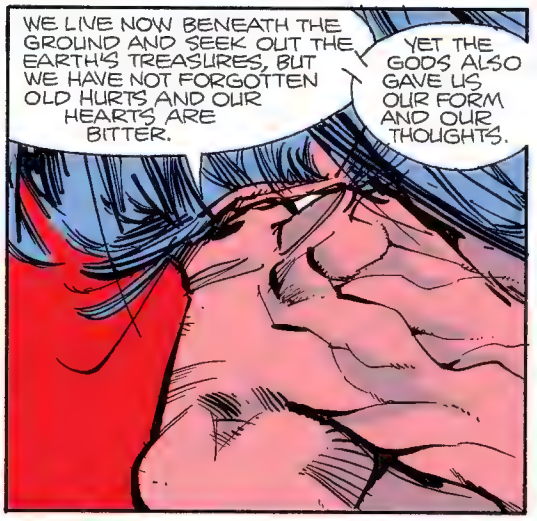
LORD ODIN, I AM HONORED. AND GRATEFUL. YOUR PHYSICIANS AND YOUR SMITHS HAVE WORKED WONDERS. I AM NEARLY HEALED. HOW IS YOUR SON?
WELL ENOUGH, THANK YOU. ALL THINGS CONSIDERED.
AND YOU? THE GOSSIP OF THE HOUSE TELLS OF YOUR SINGULAR LACK OF ENTHUSIASM CONCERNING YOUR VICTORY.
I AM DEEPLY TROUBLED, MY LORD. FOR MYSELF AND MY PEOPLE. THEY NEED THE POWER OF THE HAMMER DESPERATELY. BUT MY HEART MISGIVES ME.
THOUGH I HAVE WON THIS BATTLE, IS MY CLAIM TO THE HAMMER'S POWER ESTABLISHED FOREVER, OR ONLY UNTIL I, MYSELF, MEET SOME STRONGER CHALLENGER?
THE HAMMER WAS FORGED IN THE BEGINNING OF TIME TO BE CARRIED BY THOR ALONE. MY VICTORY DOES NOT ALTER THAT. NOR PERMIT ME TO FORGET IT.
AND, IN TRUTH, I COULD NOT BRING MYSELF TO SLAY THOR, ALTHOUGH SUCH WAS THE ESTABLISHED CONDITION OF THE CONTEST.
YOU ARE A HIGH AND PUISSANT LORD. IS THERE NO WAY OUT OF THIS DILEMMA OF HONOR AND NEED?
YOU HAVE BUT TO ASK.
CAN YOU... HELP ME?
IN THE PAST, IN RETURN FOR HELP, THE GODS DEMANDED A SACRIFICE. YOU HAVE ALREADY GIVEN ME SOMETHING MORE PRECIOUS THAN ANYTHING—THE LIFE OF MY SON.
YOU HAVE PROVEN YOURSELF ABLE TO WIELD GREAT POWER AND WIELD IT WISELY. AND, YOU HAVE ASKED FOR HELP.
THEREFORE, I WILL GIVE YOU WHAT AID I CAN. I SHALL BESTOW UPON YOU A GIFT THAT CARRIES AN AWESOME RESPONSIBILITY.
THE GIFT MAY YET SAVE YOUR PEOPLE... THE RESPONSIBILITY MIGHT DESTROY YOU!
THROOD
BOOOM

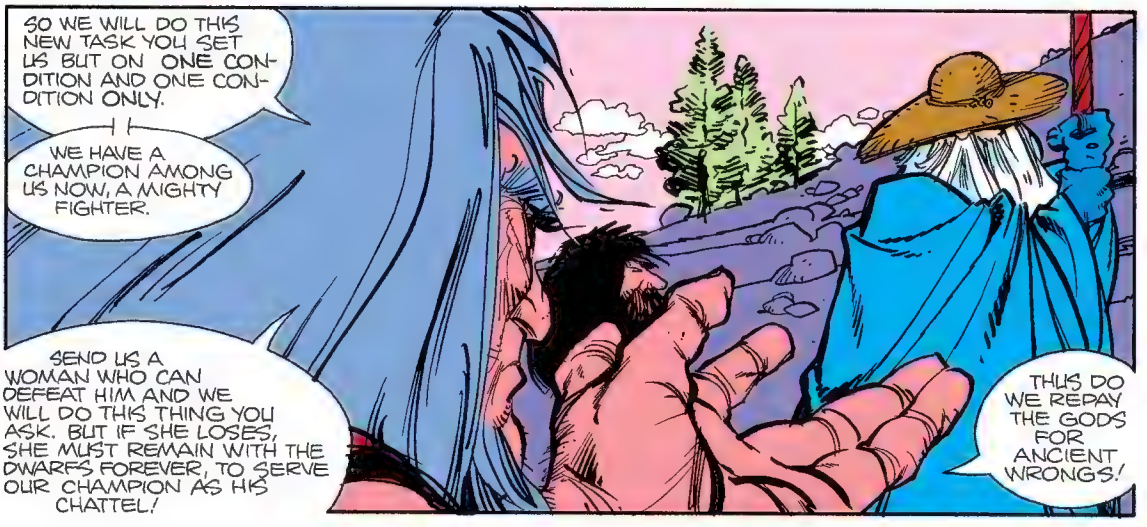
IT IS DUSK WHEN A SOLITARY RIDER CRESTS THE DIVIDE THAT OVERLOOKS NIDAVELLIR, THE REALM OF THE DWARFS...
EITRI, LOOK! SOMEONE HAS CROSSED THE FORBIDDEN PATH THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS OF ULLTHANG!
GREETINGS, NOBLE DWARFS.
EVENING COMES ON AND THIS WANDERER HAS JOURNEYED FAR. MIGHT I SHARE YOUR FIRE AND FELLOWSHIP THIS NIGHT? YOU'LL FIND ME A GENIAL COMPANION.
WEL-COME, MOST HIGH. PLEASE ACCEPT OUR HOSPITALITY.
YOU KNOW ME, EITRI?
HAD I BUT ONE EYE, LORD ODIN, I SHOULD RECOGNIZE YOUR MANTLED POWER EVEN IN THE DARK.
AND I WOULD KNOW THAT YOU HAD SOUGHT ME OUT FOR A PURPOSE, NOT MERELY TO SHARE A FIRE.
WHAT DOES THE LORD OF ASGARD SEEK IN NIDAVELLIR?
YOUR SKILL, EITRI. FOR A TASK THAT ONLY YOU CAN PERFORM.
COME THEN. SIT BESIDE ME AND TELL ME WHAT THE DWARFS CAN DO FOR THE GODS.

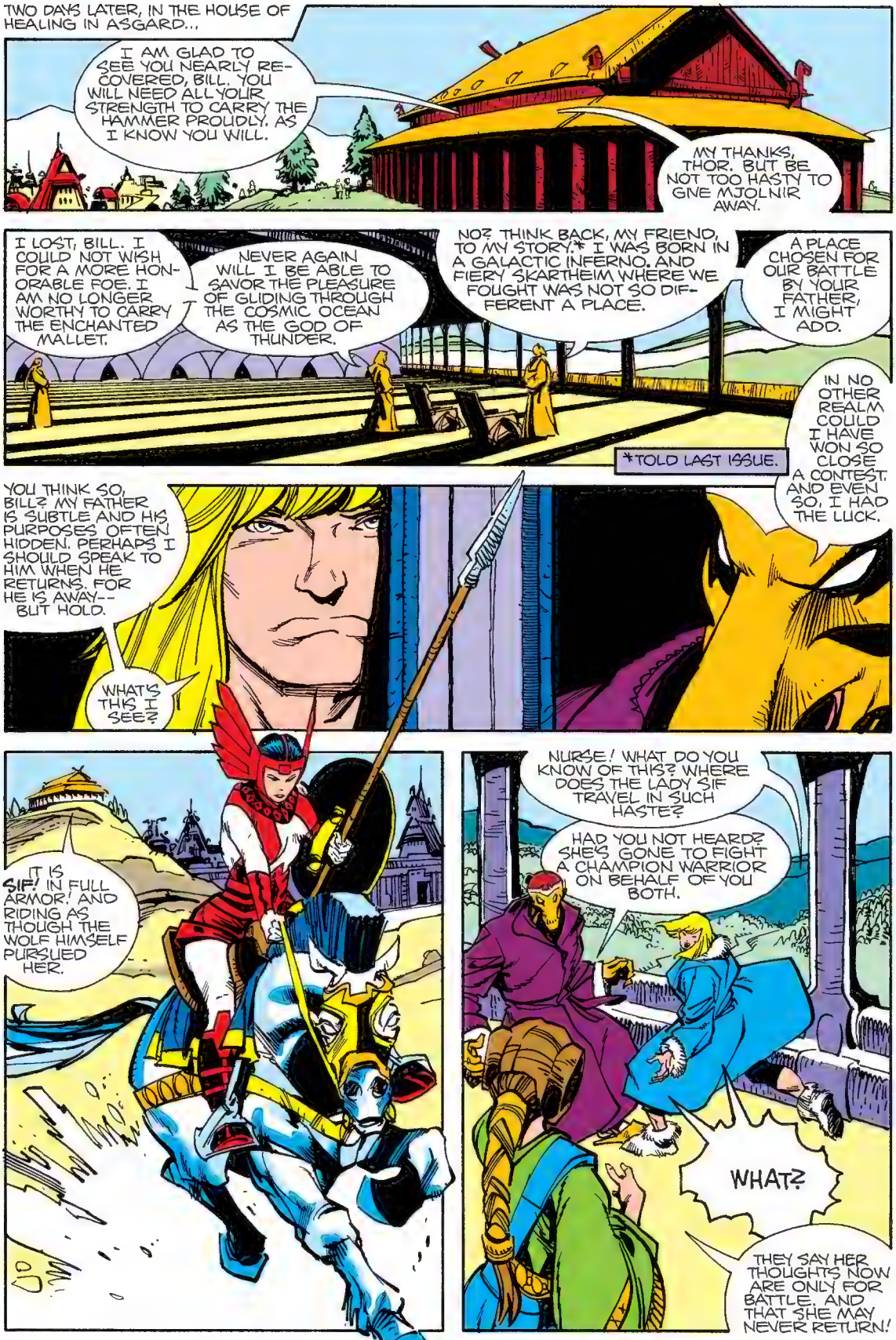
THE TWO TALK THROUGH THE NIGHT UNTIL FINALLY, WITH THE COMING OF DAWN...


YOU ASK MUCH, LORD ODIN. MORE THAN WE DWARFS CAN EASILY GIVE.
IF THE TASK WERE SIMPLE, EITRI, I WOULD NOT HAVE SOUGHT OUT THE GREATEST OF ALL DWARF SMITHS.
SO YOU SAY!

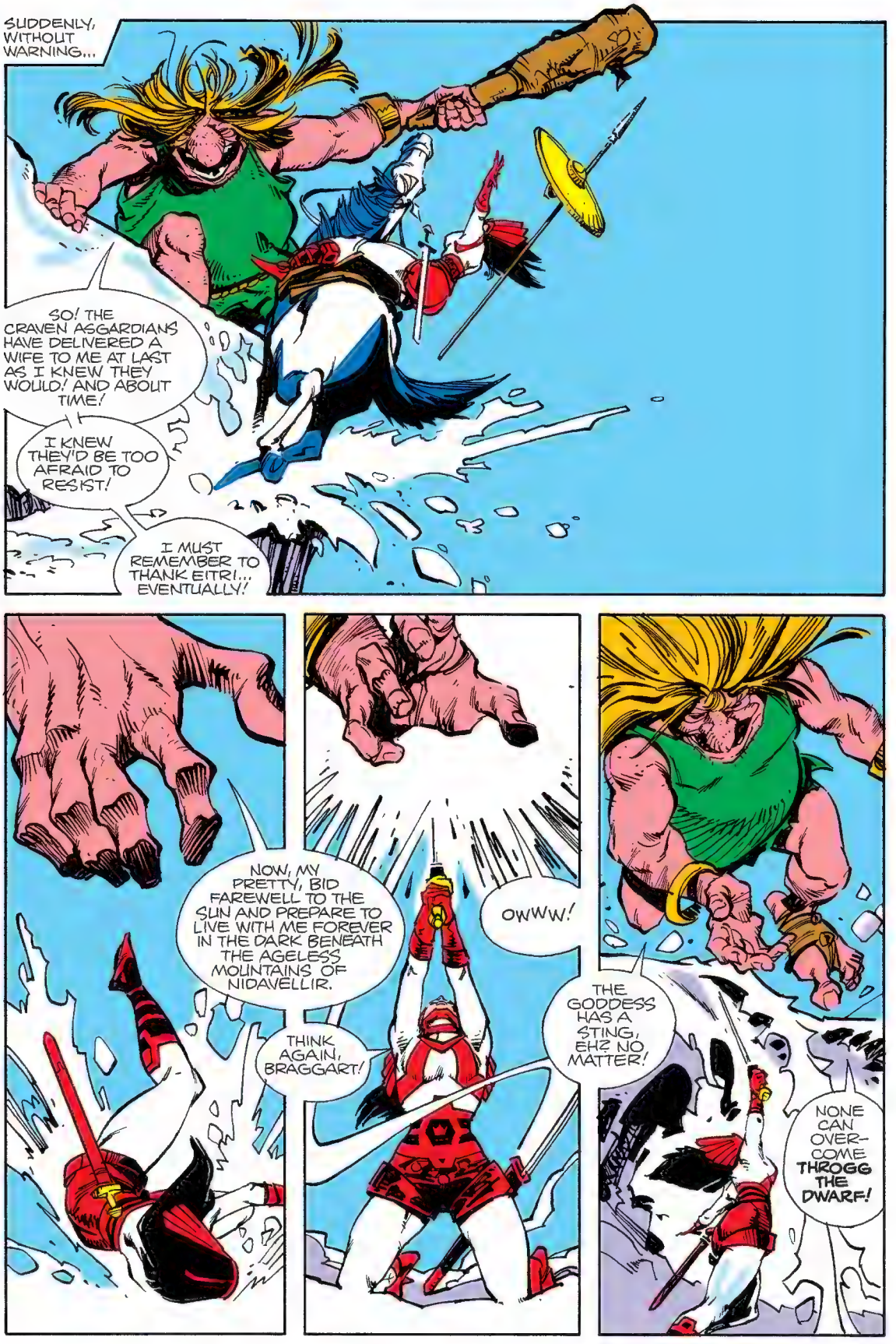


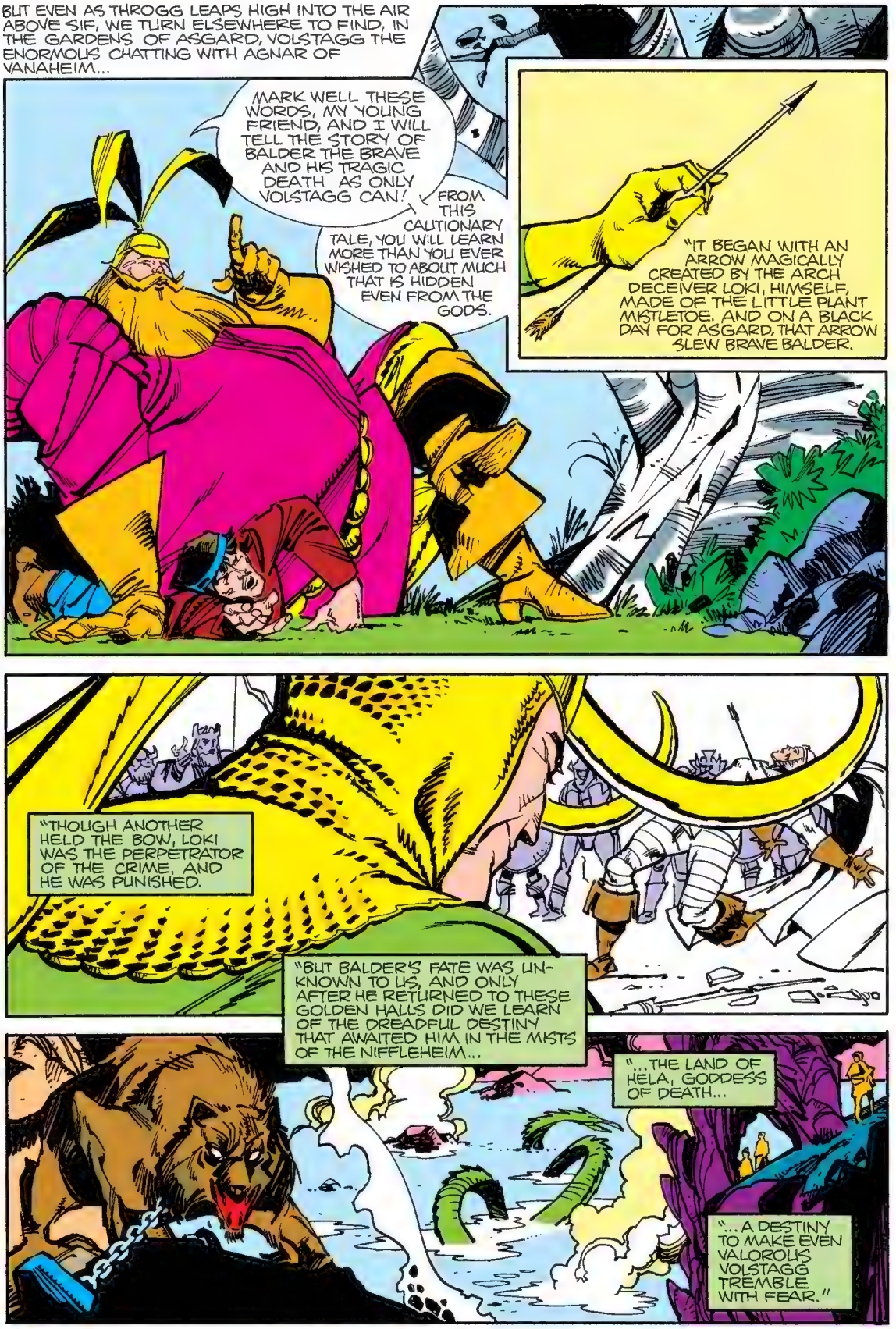

WE LIVE NOW BENEATH THE GROUND AND SEEK OUT THE EARTH'S TREASURES, BUT WE HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN OLD HURTS AND OUR HEARTS ARE BITTER.
YET THE GODS ALSO GAVE US OUR FORM AND OUR THOUGHTS.

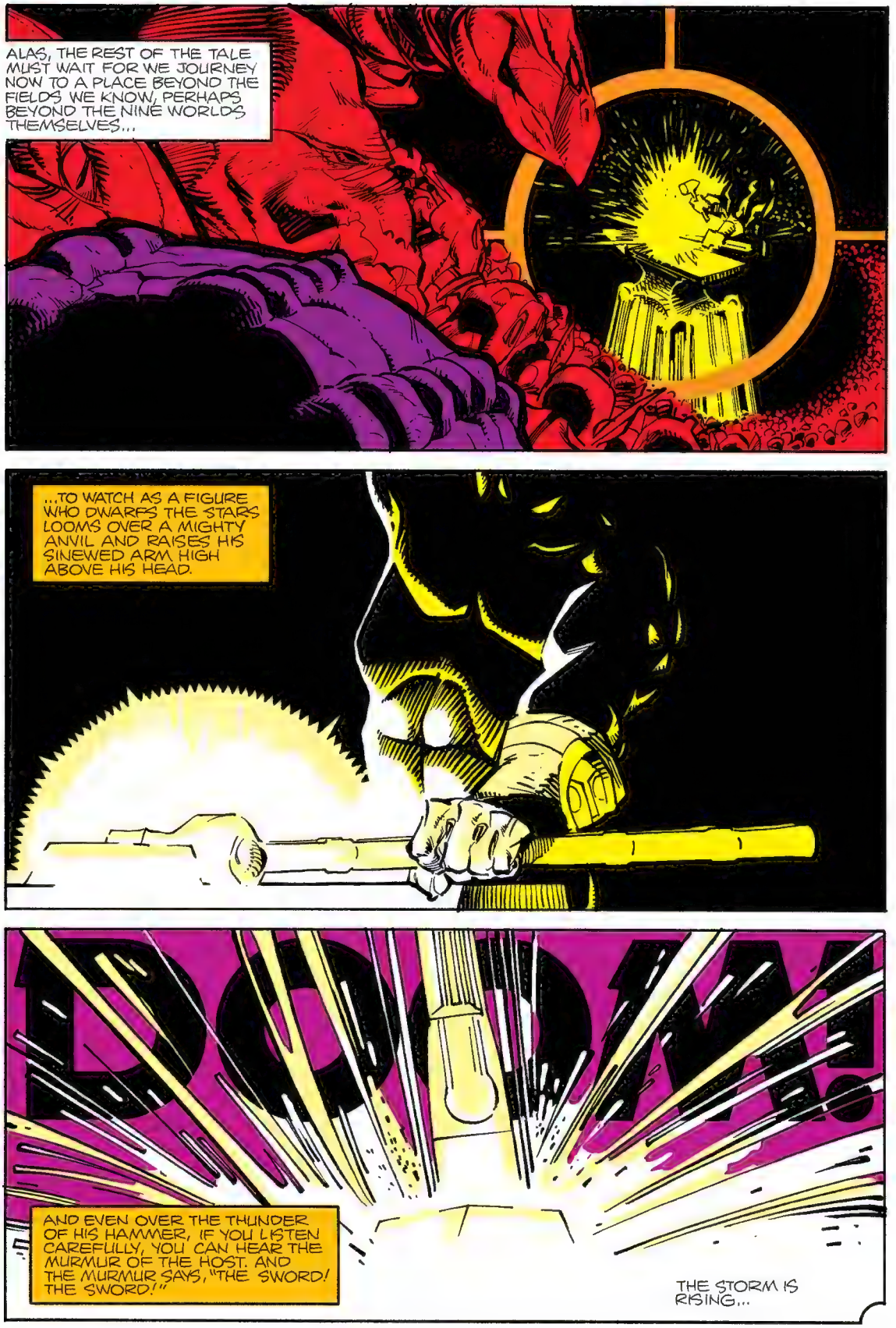

SO WE WILL DO THIS NEW TASK YOU SET US BUT ON ONE CONDITION AND ONE CONDITION ONLY.
WE HAVE A CHAMPION AMONG US NOW, A MIGHTY FIGHTER.
SEND US A WOMAN WHO CAN DEFEAT HIM AND WE WILL DO THIS THING YOU ASK. BUT IF SHE LOSES, SHE MUST REMAIN WITH THE DWARFS FOREVER, TO SERVE OUR CHAMPION AS HIS CHATTEL!
THUS DO WE REPAY THE GODS FOR ANCIENT WRONGS!

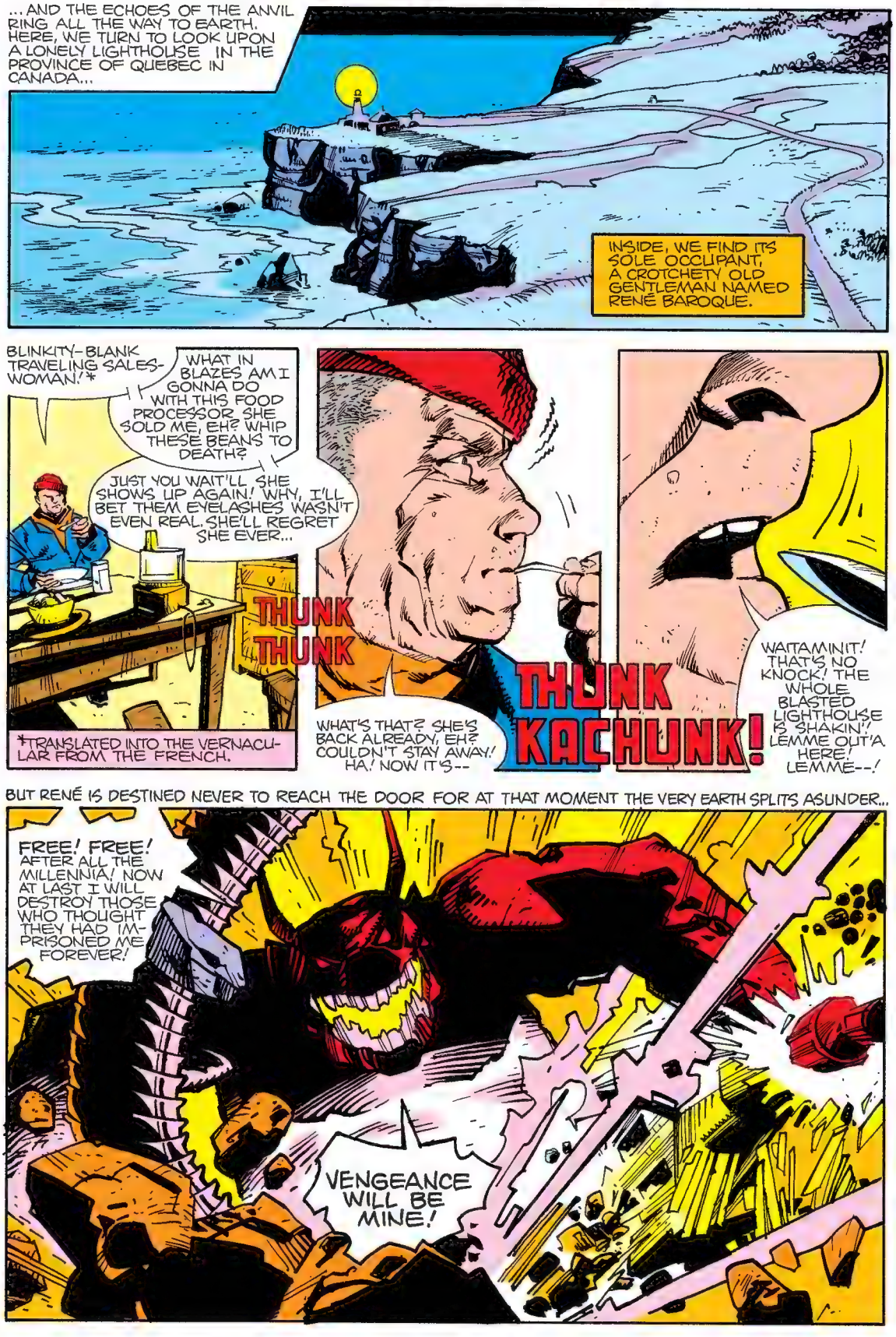

TWO DAYS LATER, IN THE HOUSE OF HEALING IN ASGARD...
I AM GLAD TO SEE YOU NEARLY RECOVERED, BILL. YOU WILL NEED ALL YOUR STRENGTH TO CARRY THE HAMMER PROUDLY, AS I KNOW YOU WILL.
MY THANKS, THOR. BUT BE NOT TOO HASTY TO GIVE MJOLNIR AWAY.
I LOST, BILL. I COULD NOT WISH FOR A MORE HONORABLE FOE. I AM NO LONGER WORTHY TO CARRY THE ENCHANTED MALLET.
NEVER AGAIN WILL I BE ABLE TO SAVOR THE PLEASURE OF GLIDING THROUGH THE COSMIC OCEAN AS THE GOD OF THUNDER.
NO? THINK BACK, MY FRIEND, TO MY STORY.* I WAS BORN IN A GALACTIC INFERNO. AND FIERY SKARTHEIM WHERE WE FOUGHT WAS NOT SO DIFFERENT A PLACE.
A PLACE CHOSEN FOR OUR BATTLE BY YOUR FATHER, I MIGHT ADD.
IN NO OTHER REALM COULD I HAVE WON SO CLOSE A CONTEST. AND EVEN SO, I HAD THE LUCK.
*TOLD LAST ISSUE.
YOU THINK SO, BILL? MY FATHER IS SUBTLE AND HIS PURPOSES OFTEN HIDDEN. PERHAPS I SHOULD SPEAK TO HIM WHEN HE RETURNS. FOR HE IS AWAY-- BUT HOLD.
WHAT'S THIS I SEE?
IT IS SIF! IN FULL ARMOR! AND RIDING AS THOUGH THE WOLF HIMSELF PURSUED HER.
NURSE! WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF THIS? WHERE DOES THE LADY SIF TRAVEL IN SUCH HASTE?
HAD YOU NOT HEARD? SHE'S GONE TO FIGHT A CHAMPION WARRIOR ON BEHALF OF YOU BOTH.
WHAT?
THEY SAY HER THOUGHTS NOW ARE ONLY FOR BATTLE, AND THAT SHE MAY NEVER RETURN!

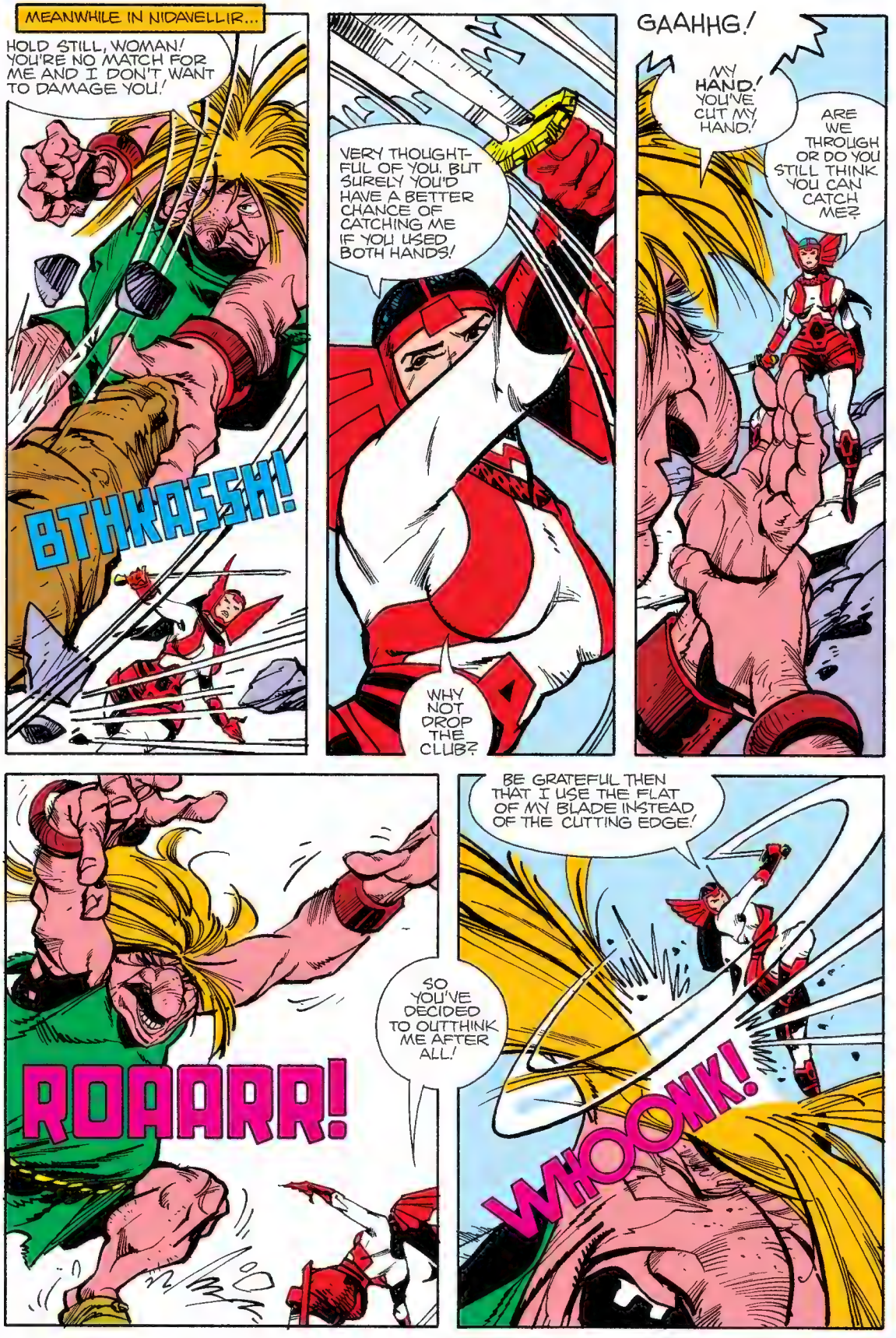
BUT AS SIF PASSES THROUGH ASGARD'S GOLDEN GATES, THE COMING BATTLE IS ONLY ONE OF MANY THOUGHTS THAT SPIN THROUGH HER MIND...
...AS SHE SEES AGAIN HER MEETING WITH THE ALL-FATHER THAT VERY MORNING.
SUCH WAS MY BARGAIN, SIF. THE DWARFS WANT A GODDESS TO FIGHT THEIR CHAMPION AND I KNOW THAT YOU HAVE SOUGHT DISTRACTION TO EASE YOUR HEART'S ACHE.
BUT I DO NOT COMMAND THIS THING.
THE DECISION RESTS WITH YOU.
MY LORD, 'TIS TRUE I AM EMPTY AND THOUGHT THAT BATTLE WOULD FILL MY NEED.
NOW, FOR REASONS OF MY OWN, I WOULD GLADLY TRAVEL TO HELA'S PALLID DOMAIN ITSELF TO DEMONSTRATE MY PROWESS.
VERY WELL, CHILD. ARM THYSELF STRONGLY AND KNOW THAT I SHALL BE WATCHING OVER YOU FROM AFAR.
AND AS HER THOUGHTS RETURN TO THE PRESENT...
I DARED NOT TELL EVEN ODIN THAT I RIDE NOW EAGER TO BATTLE BECAUSE OF A DESIRE SO SECRET THAT NONE MUST KNOW. I CAN SCARCELY BELIEVE IT MYSELF.
THERE IS ANOTHER WARRIOR IN THIS WORLD WHO IS AS BRAVE, AS VALIANT AS THE MIGHTY THOR!
AND THOUGH HE WEARS A GUISE AS ALIEN AS ANY I HAVE EVER SEEN, STILL I WOULD FIND FAVOR IN HIS EYES.
STILL I WOULD SHOW HIM THAT I, TOO, AM A WARRIOR BORN.

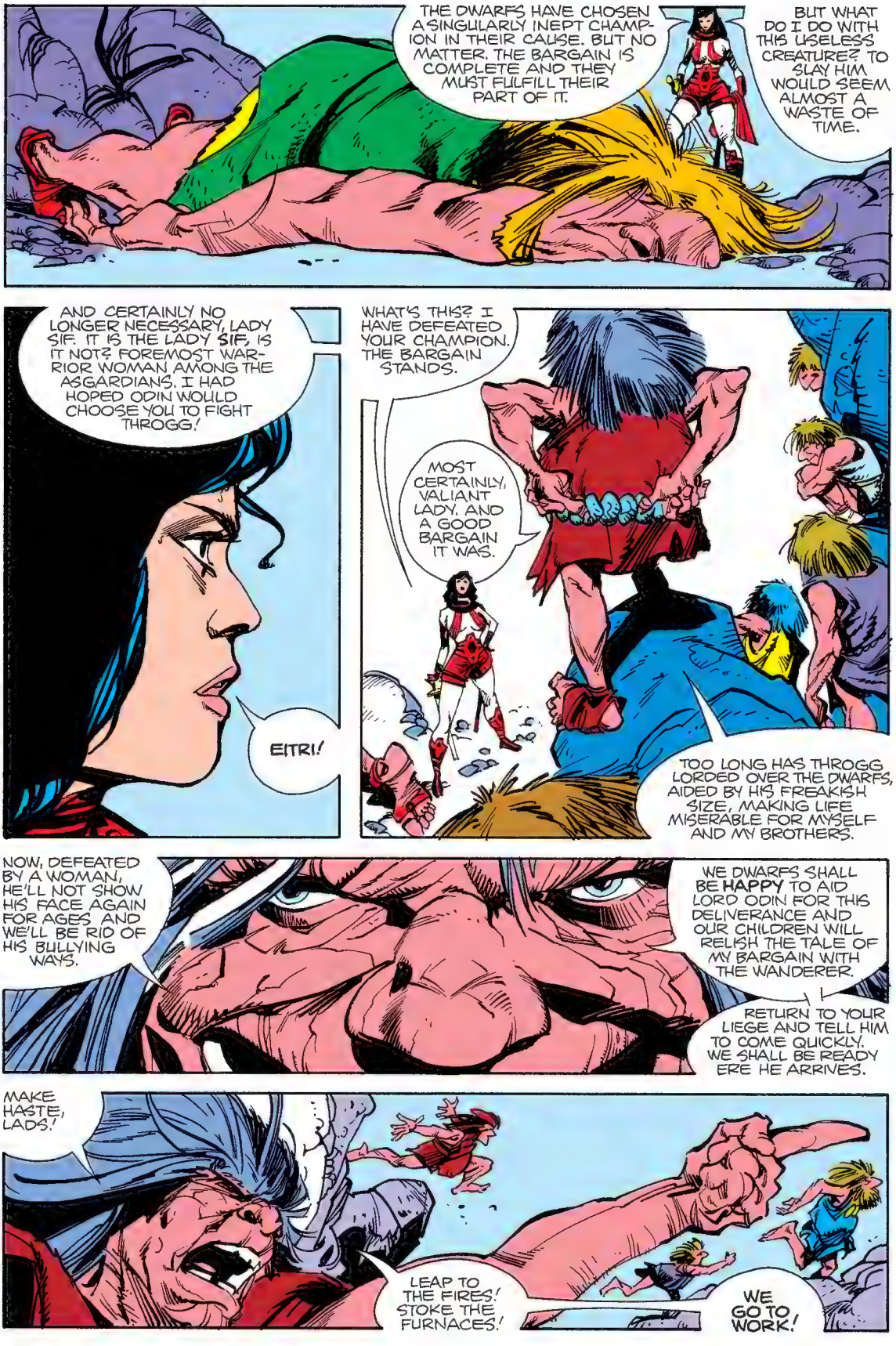

SUDDENLY, WITHOUT WARNING...
SO! THE CRAVEN ASGARDIANS HAVE DELIVERED A WIFE TO ME AT LAST AS I KNEW THEY WOULD! AND ABOUT TIME!
I KNEW THEY'D BE TOO AFRAID TO RESIST!
I MUST REMEMBER TO THANK EITRI... EVENTUALLY!
NOW, MY PRETTY, BID FAREWELL TO THE SUN AND PREPARE TO LIVE WITH ME FOREVER IN THE DARK BENEATH THE AGELESS MOUNTAINS OF NIDAVELLIR.
THINK AGAIN, BRAGGART!
OWWW!
THE GODDESS HAS A STING, EH? NO MATTER!
NONE CAN OVER-COME THROGG THE DWARF!


BUT EVEN AS THROGG LEAPS HIGH INTO THE AIR ABOVE SIF, WE TURN ELSEWHERE TO FIND, IN THE GARDENS OF ASGARD, VOLSTAGG THE ENORMOUS CHATTING WITH AGNAR OF VANAHEIM...
MARK WELL THESE WORDS, MY YOUNG FRIEND, AND I WILL TELL THE STORY OF BALDER THE BRAVE AND HIS TRAGIC DEATH AS ONLY VOLSTAGG CAN!
FROM THIS CAUTIONARY TALE, YOU WILL LEARN MORE THAN YOU EVER WISHED TO ABOUT MUCH THAT IS HIDDEN EVEN FROM THE GODS.
"IT BEGAN WITH AN ARROW MAGICALLY CREATED BY THE ARCH DECEIVER LOKI, HIMSELF, MADE OF THE LITTLE PLANT MISTLETOE. AND ON A BLACK DAY FOR ASGARD, THAT ARROW SLEW BRAVE BALDER.
"THOUGH ANOTHER HELD THE BOW, LOKI WAS THE PERPETRATOR OF THE CRIME, AND HE WAS PUNISHED.
"BUT BALDER'S FATE WAS UNKNOWN TO US, AND ONLY AFTER HE RETURNED TO THESE GOLDEN HALLS DID WE LEARN OF THE DREADFUL DESTINY THAT AWAITED HIM IN THE MISTS OF THE NIFFLEHEIM...
"...THE LAND OF HELA, GODDESS OF DEATH...
"...A DESTINY TO MAKE EVEN VALOROUS VOLSTAGG TREMBLE WITH FEAR."

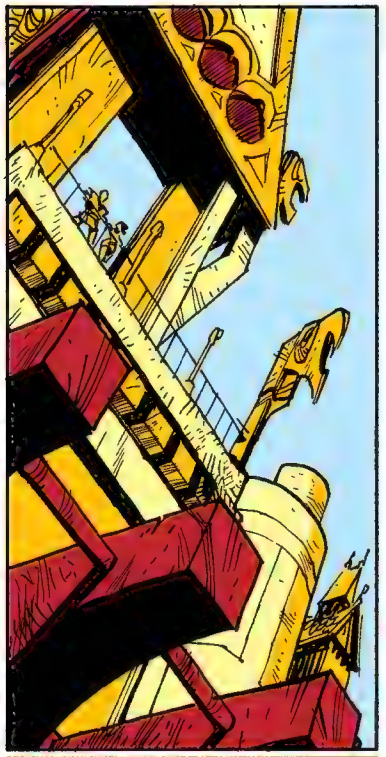

ALAS, THE REST OF THE TALE MUST WAIT FOR WE JOURNEY NOW TO A PLACE BEYOND THE FIELDS WE KNOW, PERHAPS BEYOND THE NINE WORLDS THEMSELVES...
...TO WATCH AS A FIGURE WHO DWARFS THE STARS LOOMS OVER A MIGHTY ANVIL AND RAISES HIS SINEWED ARM HIGH ABOVE HIS HEAD.
BOOM
AND EVEN OVER THE THUNDER OF HIS HAMMER, IF YOU LISTEN CAREFULLY, YOU CAN HEAR THE MURMUR OF THE HOST. AND THE MURMUR SAYS, "THE SWORD! THE SWORD!"
THE STORM IS RISING...


...AND THE ECHOES OF THE ANVIL RING ALL THE WAY TO EARTH. HERE, WE TURN TO LOOK UPON A LONELY LIGHTHOUSE IN THE PROVINCE OF QUEBEC IN CANADA...
INSIDE, WE FIND ITS SOLE OCCUPANT, A CROTCHETY OLD GENTLEMAN NAMED RENÉ BAROQUE.
BLINKITY-BLANK TRAVELING SALES-WOMAN!*
WHAT IN BLAZES AM I GONNA DO WITH THIS FOOD PROCESSOR SHE SOLD ME, EH? WHIP THESE BEANS TO DEATH?
JUST YOU WAIT'LL SHE SHOWS UP AGAIN! WHY, I'LL BET THEM EYELASHES WASN'T EVEN REAL. SHE'LL REGRET SHE EVER...
THUNK THUNK
*TRANSLATED INTO THE VERNACULAR FROM THE FRENCH.
WHAT'S THAT? SHE'S BACK ALREADY, EH? COULDN'T STAY AWAY! HA! NOW IT'S--
THUNK KACHUNK!
WAITAMINIT! THAT'S NO KNOCK! THE WHOLE BLASTED LIGHTHOUSE IS SHAKIN'! LEMME OUT'A HERE! LEMME--!
BUT RENÉ IS DESTINED NEVER TO REACH THE DOOR FOR AT THAT MOMENT THE VERY EARTH SPLITS ASUNDER...
FREE! FREE! AFTER ALL THE MILLENNIA! NOW AT LAST I WILL DESTROY THOSE WHO THOUGHT THEY HAD IMPRISONED ME FOREVER!
VENGEANCE WILL BE MINE!


MEANWHILE IN NIDAVELLIR...
HOLD STILL, WOMAN! YOU'RE NO MATCH FOR ME AND I DON'T WANT TO DAMAGE YOU!
BTHKASSH!
VERY THOUGHTFUL OF YOU. BUT SURELY YOU'D HAVE A BETTER CHANCE OF CATCHING ME IF YOU USED BOTH HANDS!
WHY NOT DROP THE CLUB?
GAAHHG!
MY HAND! YOU'VE CUT MY HAND!
ARE WE THROUGH OR DO YOU STILL THINK YOU CAN CATCH ME?
ROAARR!
SO YOU'VE DECIDED TO OUTTHINK ME AFTER ALL!
BE GRATEFUL THEN THAT I USE THE FLAT OF MY BLADE INSTEAD OF THE CUTTING EDGE!
WHOONK!


THE DWARFS HAVE CHOSEN A SINGULARLY INEPT CHAMPION IN THEIR CAUSE. BUT NO MATTER. THE BARGAIN IS COMPLETE AND THEY MUST FULFILL THEIR PART OF IT.
BUT WHAT DO I DO WITH THIS USELESS CREATURE? TO SLAY HIM WOULD SEEM ALMOST A WASTE OF TIME.
AND CERTAINLY NO LONGER NECESSARY, LADY SIF. IT IS THE LADY SIF, IS IT NOT? FOREMOST WARRIOR WOMAN AMONG THE ASGARDIANS. I HAD HOPED ODIN WOULD CHOOSE YOU TO FIGHT THROGG!
EITRI!
WHAT'S THIS? I HAVE DEFEATED YOUR CHAMPION. THE BARGAIN STANDS.
MOST CERTAINLY, VALIANT LADY. AND A GOOD BARGAIN IT WAS.
TOO LONG HAS THROGG LORDED OVER THE DWARFS, AIDED BY HIS FREAKISH SIZE, MAKING LIFE MISERABLE FOR MYSELF AND MY BROTHERS.
NOW, DEFEATED BY A WOMAN, HE'LL NOT SHOW HIS FACE AGAIN FOR AGES AND WE'LL BE RID OF HIS BULLYING WAYS.
WE DWARFS SHALL BE HAPPY TO AID LORD ODIN FOR THIS DELIVERANCE AND OUR CHILDREN WILL RELISH THE TALE OF MY BARGAIN WITH THE WANDERER.
RETURN TO YOUR LIEGE AND TELL HIM TO COME QUICKLY. WE SHALL BE READY ERE HE ARRIVES.
MAKE HASTE, LADS!
LEAP TO THE FIRES! STOKE THE FURNACES!
WE GO TO WORK!

SO SIF RETURNS TO ASGARD AND THE WORD GOES OUT FROM ODIN THAT HE AND THREE OTHERS WILL JOURNEY TO THE FORGES OF NIDAVELLIR...



...THERE TO PARTICIPATE IN A CREATION SUCH AS HAS NOT BEEN SEEN SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME.

BUT AS ALL IS MADE READY FOR THE TRIP WE FIND HIGH ATOP THE TOWERS OF ASGARD, TWO FIGURES DEEP IN CONVERSATION.

I AM WORRIED, LADY SIF, FOR MY PEOPLE. EVEN NOW, THEY MAY HAVE BEEN OVERTAKEN BY THE DEMONS THAT PURSUE THEIR FLEET. AND I AM HERE, UNABLE TO DEFEND THEM.

I THINK, BILL, THAT LORD ODIN HAS BEEN WATCHING OVER THEM.

IF ANY HARM HAD BEFALLEN THEM ERE NOW, WE WOULD KNOW.

THAT MAY BE, BUT MY PLACE IS WITH THEM AND AS I AM NOW FULLY RECOVERED, I LONG TO BE GONE FROM HERE.

IN THE GLORY OF ITS MANY BEAUTIES, ASGARD ONLY SERVES TO REMIND ME JUST HOW MUCH I HAVE GIVEN UP FOREVER.

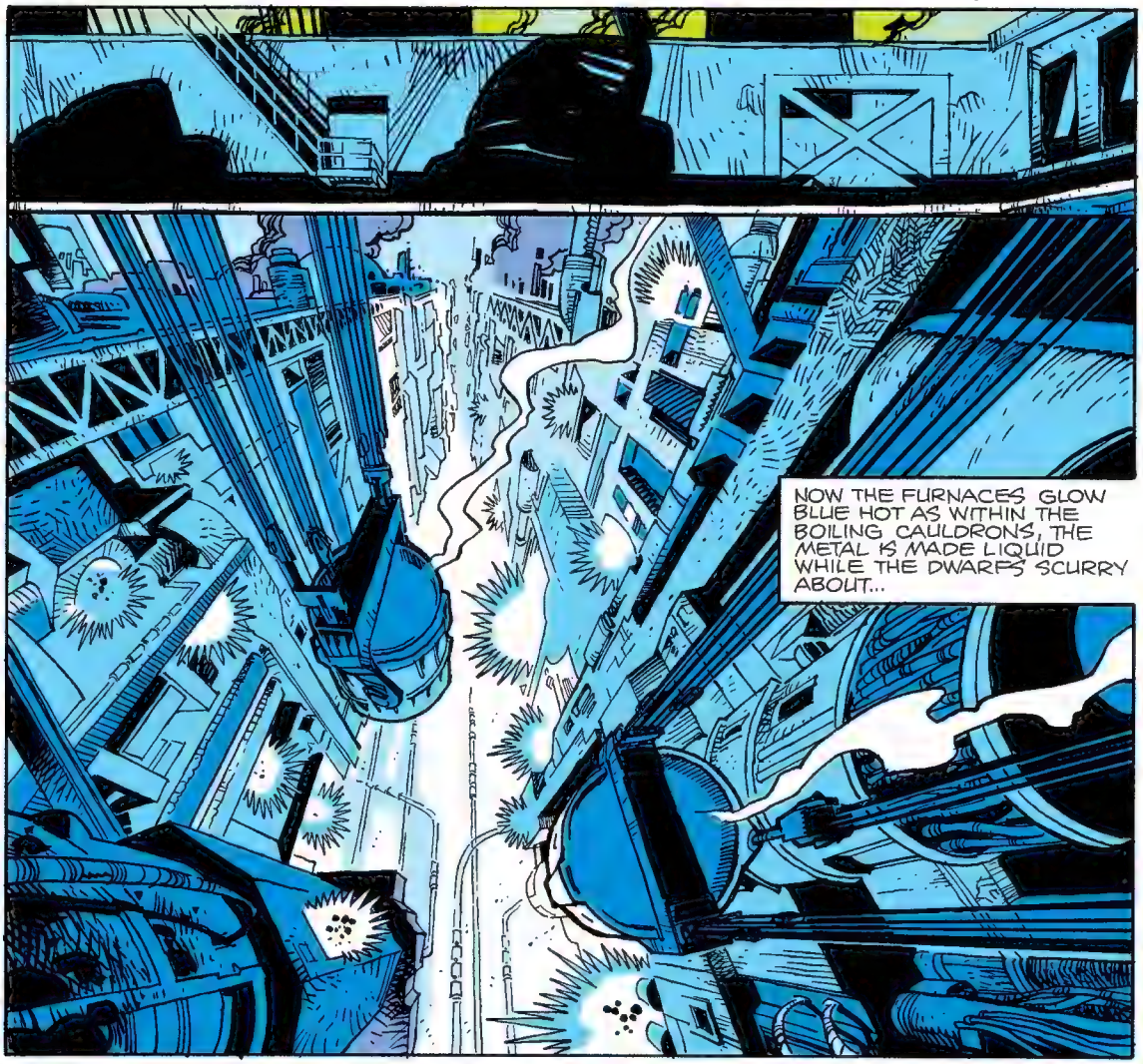
IF... IF YOUR PEOPLE FIND SAFE HAVEN EVENTUALLY, WILL YOU EVER THINK OF RETURNING TO... US, SOMEDAY?

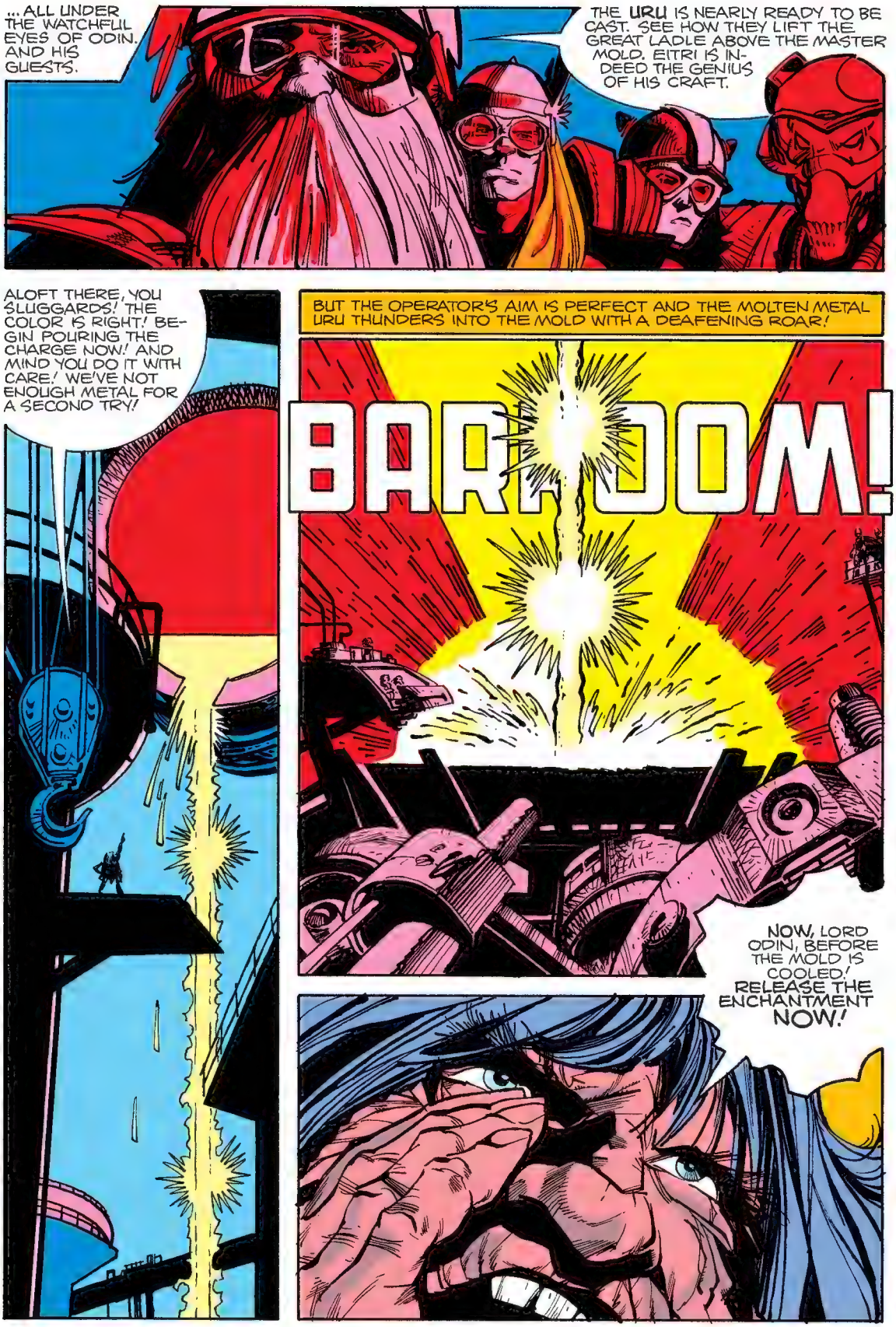
LOOK AT ME, LADY SIF. MY BROTHERS ARE THE BEASTS OF THE FORESTS, MY SISTERS THE MACHINES THAT DRIVE THE GREAT STARSHIPS.

WHEN I WAS REMADE AS A WARRIOR TO SAVE MY PEOPLE, I SURRENDERED ALL MY HUMANITY. I HAVE NONE LEFT... FOR **ANYONE**.

I DO NOT THINK I COULD BEAR THE PROSPECT OF RETURNING TO SUCH A PERFECT WORLD... NO MATTER **HOW** MUCH I MIGHT LONG TO.

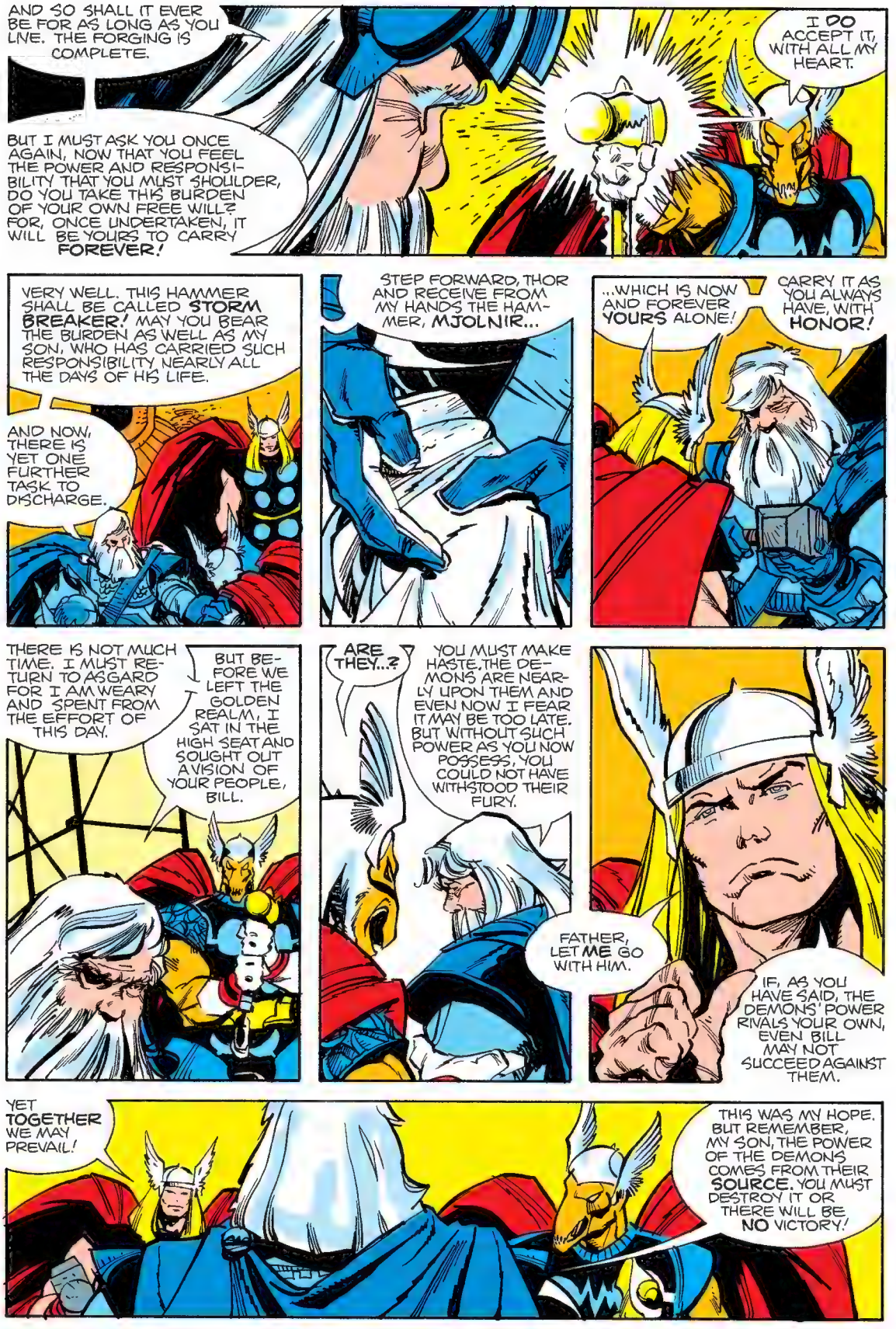
THESE ARE THE **FURNACES** OF **NIDAVELLIR,** THE GREAT FORGES OF THE DWARFS, WHERE FOR AGES, THEY HAVE CREATED THE MOST WONDERFUL DELIGHTS OF THEIR IMAGINATIONS.



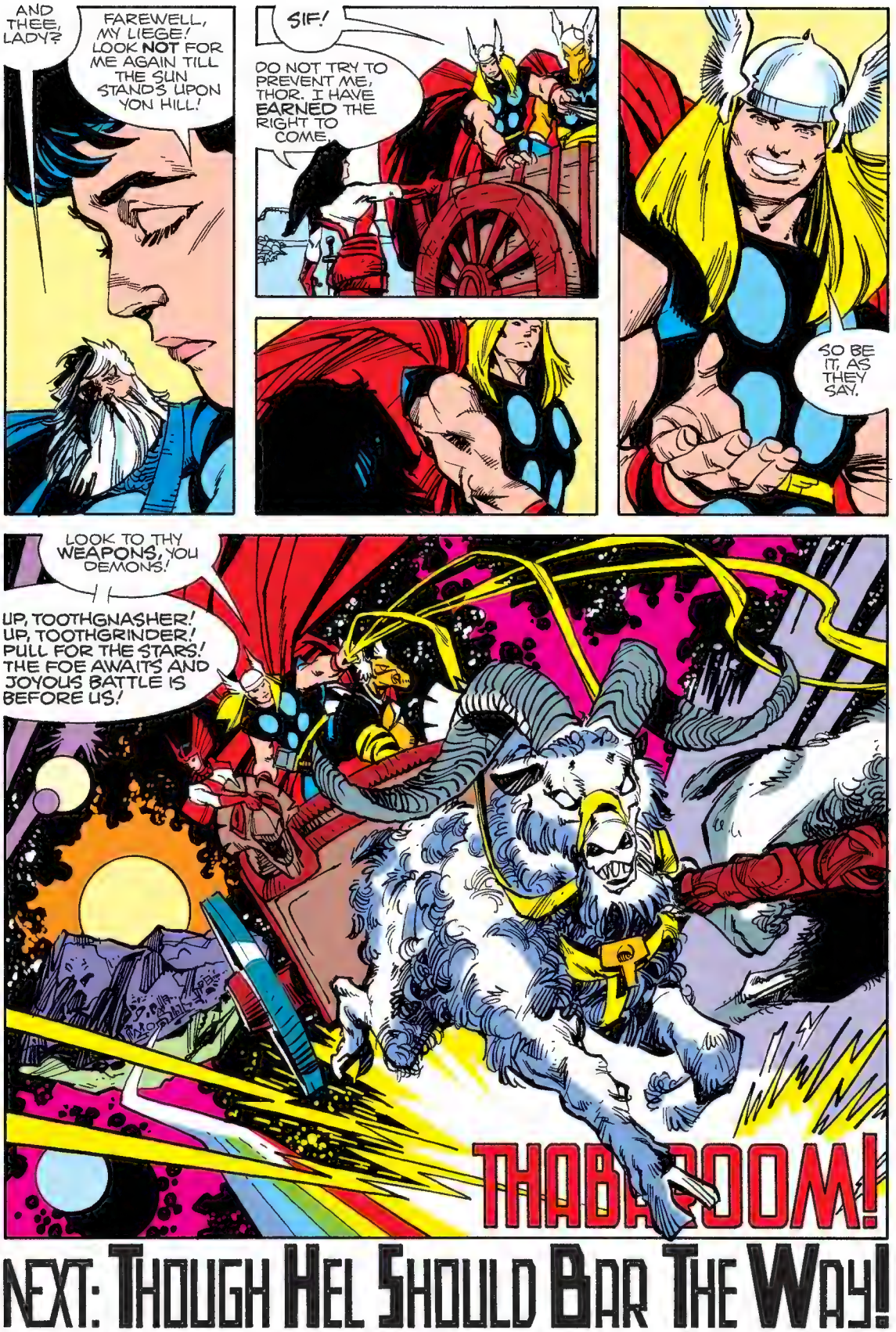

...ALL UNDER THE WATCHFUL EYES OF ODIN. AND HIS GUESTS.
THE URU IS NEARLY READY TO BE CAST. SEE HOW THEY LIFT THE GREAT LADLE ABOVE THE MASTER MOLD. EITRI IS INDEED THE GENIUS OF HIS CRAFT.
ALOFT THERE, YOU SLUGGARDS! THE COLOR IS RIGHT! BEGIN POURING THE CHARGE NOW! AND MIND YOU DO IT WITH CARE! WE'VE NOT ENOUGH METAL FOR A SECOND TRY!
BUT THE OPERATOR'S AIM IS PERFECT AND THE MOLTEN METAL URU THUNDERS INTO THE MOLD WITH A DEAFENING ROAR!
BARROOM!
NOW, LORD ODIN, BEFORE THE MOLD IS COOLED! RELEASE THE ENCHANTMENT NOW!

STAND BACK! THIS IS THE MOMENT WHEN WE SUCCEED OR FAIL! I MUST STRIKE WITH THE FULL FORCE OF THE ODIN POWER TO ACHIEVE OUR PURPOSE!
ONLY THUS CAN THE MAGIKS WE DESIRE BE LOCKED WITHIN THE URU METAL FOREVER!
SO BE IT!
KA
THOOM!
QUICKLY NOW, BILL. DON THIS GAUNTLET AND STEP FORWARD. FOR YOU THIS MAGIC IS PERFORMED AND TO YOU THIS MAGIC SHALL BE BOUND!
EITRI WILL INSTRUCT YOU!
WHAT MUST I DO, EITRI?
AS I RAISE THE DOOR, YOU MUST REACH INTO THE MOLTEN POOL WITHIN AND REMOVE THAT WHICH YOU FIND THERE. THE GAUNTLET WILL PROTECT YOU! MAKE HASTE OR THE MOMENT IS LOST!
NOW!
I...I FEEL NOTHING-- HOLD! I HAVE IT! THE WEIGHT IS ENORMOUS! BUT IT GROWS LIGHTER EVEN AS I PULL IT FROM THE FIRE!
THE POWER! IT FLOWS INTO ME! I... I'M CHANGING!

BADA BOOM!
THE ENCHANTMENT IS MINE ONCE MORE!

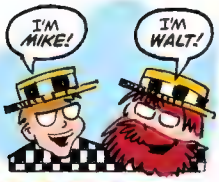

AND SO SHALL IT EVER BE FOR AS LONG AS YOU LIVE. THE FORGING IS COMPLETE.
BUT I MUST ASK YOU ONCE AGAIN, NOW THAT YOU FEEL THE POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY THAT YOU MUST SHOULDER, DO YOU TAKE THIS BURDEN OF YOUR OWN FREE WILL? FOR, ONCE UNDERTAKEN, IT WILL BE YOURS TO CARRY FOREVER!
I DO ACCEPT IT, WITH ALL MY HEART.
VERY WELL. THIS HAMMER SHALL BE CALLED STORM BREAKER! MAY YOU BEAR THE BURDEN AS WELL AS MY SON, WHO HAS CARRIED SUCH RESPONSIBILITY NEARLY ALL THE DAYS OF HIS LIFE.
AND NOW, THERE IS YET ONE FURTHER TASK TO DISCHARGE.
STEP FORWARD, THOR AND RECEIVE FROM MY HANDS THE HAMMER, MJOLNIR...
...WHICH IS NOW AND FOREVER YOURS ALONE!
CARRY IT AS YOU ALWAYS HAVE, WITH HONOR!
THERE IS NOT MUCH TIME. I MUST RETURN TO ASGARD FOR I AM WEARY AND SPENT FROM THE EFFORT OF THIS DAY.
BUT BEFORE WE LEFT THE GOLDEN REALM, I SAT IN THE HIGH SEAT AND SOUGHT OUT A VISION OF YOUR PEOPLE, BILL.
ARE THEY...?
YOU MUST MAKE HASTE. THE DEMONS ARE NEARLY UPON THEM AND EVEN NOW I FEAR IT MAY BE TOO LATE. BUT WITHOUT SUCH POWER AS YOU NOW POSSESS, YOU COULD NOT HAVE WITHSTOOD THEIR FURY.
FATHER, LET ME GO WITH HIM.
IF, AS YOU HAVE SAID, THE DEMONS' POWER RIVALS YOUR OWN, EVEN BILL MAY NOT SUCCEED AGAINST THEM.
YET TOGETHER WE MAY PREVAIL!
THIS WAS MY HOPE. BUT REMEMBER, MY SON, THE POWER OF THE DEMONS COMES FROM THEIR SOURCE. YOU MUST DESTROY IT OR THERE WILL BE NO VICTORY!

I WILL NOT BE ABLE TO HELP YOU FURTHER. YOUR FIGHTING HEARTS YOUR GREAT COURAGE, THESE MUST SEE YOU THROUGH.
NOW MAKE HASTE, TIME IS SHORT.
MY LORD AND FATHER...
...NOTHING SHALL STAND AGAINST US!
NOTHING!
KLAASSH!
YET HOW SHALL WE FIND YOUR PEOPLE?
FEAR NOT. MY INTERNAL SENSORS WILL GUIDE US. BUT CAN WE REACH THEM IN TIME? FOR THE JOURNEY WILL BE LONG AND WE MAY NEED PROVISION.
NOW I MAY SAY, "FEAR NOT."
HO, TOOTHGNASHER, HO, TOOTHGRINDER, LEAVE YOUR GREEN PASTURES AND ANSWER YOUR MASTER'S CALL. FOR WE MUST TRAVEL FAST AND FAR AND ONLY YOU CAN TAKE US TO OUR DESTINY.
AND FROM OUT OF THE THUNDER AND LIGHTNING, THOR'S CALL IS ANSWERED.
KABAKATHOOM!
FAREWELL, FATHER! LOOK FOR US FROM YOUR HIGH SEAT AND GUIDE OUR STEPS!
FAREWELL, LORD ODIN! LOOK FOR US AGAIN WHERE WE HAVE HAD THE VICTORY!


AND THEE, LADY?
FAREWELL, MY LIEGE! LOOK NOT FOR ME AGAIN TILL THE SUN STANDS UPON YON HILL!
SIF!
DO NOT TRY TO PREVENT ME, THOR. I HAVE EARNED THE RIGHT TO COME.
SO BE IT, AS THEY SAY.
LOOK TO THY WEAPONS, YOU DEMONS!
UP, TOOTHGNASHER! UP, TOOTHGRINDER! PULL FOR THE STARS! THE FOE AWAITS AND JOYOUS BATTLE IS BEFORE US!
THABA-BOOM!

NEXT: THOUGH HEL SHOULD BAR THE WAY!

CARLIN & SIMONSON'S PAGE O' THOR STUFF.



SAY, MIKE, WHAT HAS 26 LEGS, 13 NOSES, WEARS A DRESS AND FLIES?

I DUNNO, WALT. WHAT HAS 26 LEGS, 13 NOSES, WEARS A DRESS AND FLIES?

THE THIRTEEN MARVEL EDITORS THAT ARE EN ROUTE TO SAN DIEGO FOR THE 1983 SAN DIEGO COMIC CONVENTION, THAT'S WHAT!

THAT'S RIGHT, FOLKS... MY BOSS, EDITOR MARK GRUENWALD, HAS FLOWN THE COUP AND LEFT THIS TURKEY IN CHARGE! THE FELLOW TO MY RIGHT IS *WILEY WALT SIMONSON*, CREATOR OF THE SWELL COMIC BOOK PRODUCT THAT YOU NOW CLASP!

THANKS FOR THE INTRO, *MR. EDITOR!* AND WITH *MADCAP MIKE CARLIN* IN CHARGE AROUND HERE, I JUST HOPE HE DOESN'T SCREW ANYTHING UP FOR MARK, WHAT WITH HIS CAVALIER HANDLING OF THIS LETTERS PAGE.

NO CHANCE!

MARK TRUSTS MY JUDGMENT... I'M HANDLING *IRON MAN#178*, *CAPTAIN AMERICA#289* AND *AVENGERS #239* EXACTLY THE SAME WAY. IT'S THE SHENANIGANS THAT JIM SHOOTER HAS PLANNED FOR THE WEST COAST THAT HAVE GOTTEN MARK WORRIED-- JUST LOOK AT THIS NOTE HE LEFT ON MY DESK!

MIKE — 7-29-83

If I die have my wife Belinda look behind my far left file cabinet for what I want said at my funeral.

— MARK

OH, HE'LL DIE, ALL RIGHT... WHEN HE SEES THE QUESTION YOU'VE SELECTED FOR THIS MONTH'S *QUESTION OF THE MONTH!*

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

What is your shoe size?
Walt Simonson, writer/artist: "12D"
John Workman, letterer: "7½"
George Roussos, colorist: "8½EE"
Mike Carlin, assistant editor: "9½"
Mark Gruenwald, editor: "I don't wear shoes."
Jim Shooter, editor in chief: "13D"

SURELY!

HEY, MIKE, THIS GOD OF THUNDER STUFF *HURTS!!*

WALTER, OLD BEAN, WHAT SAY WE GIVE THESE GOOD PEOPLE OUT THERE A TASTE OF THE *THOR STUFF* THEY'VE COME TO SEE, SHALL WE?

M. Carlin & W. Simonson 8-1-83

BA-BOOM

OMIGOSH!! WITH ALL MY GOOFIN' AROUND I WENT AND INJURED ONE OF OUR STAR FREELANCERS! MARK'S GONNA KILL ME WHEN HE GETS BACK!

*THIS JUST IN: **WALT SIMONSON**, INJURED MERE MOMENTS AGO, IS ALREADY FULLY-RECOVERED, SO IF YOUR NAME IS **MARK GRUENWALD**, DO NOT, WE REPEAT, **DO NOT** KILL MIKE CARLIN. THANK YOU...*

MARVEL
the mighty
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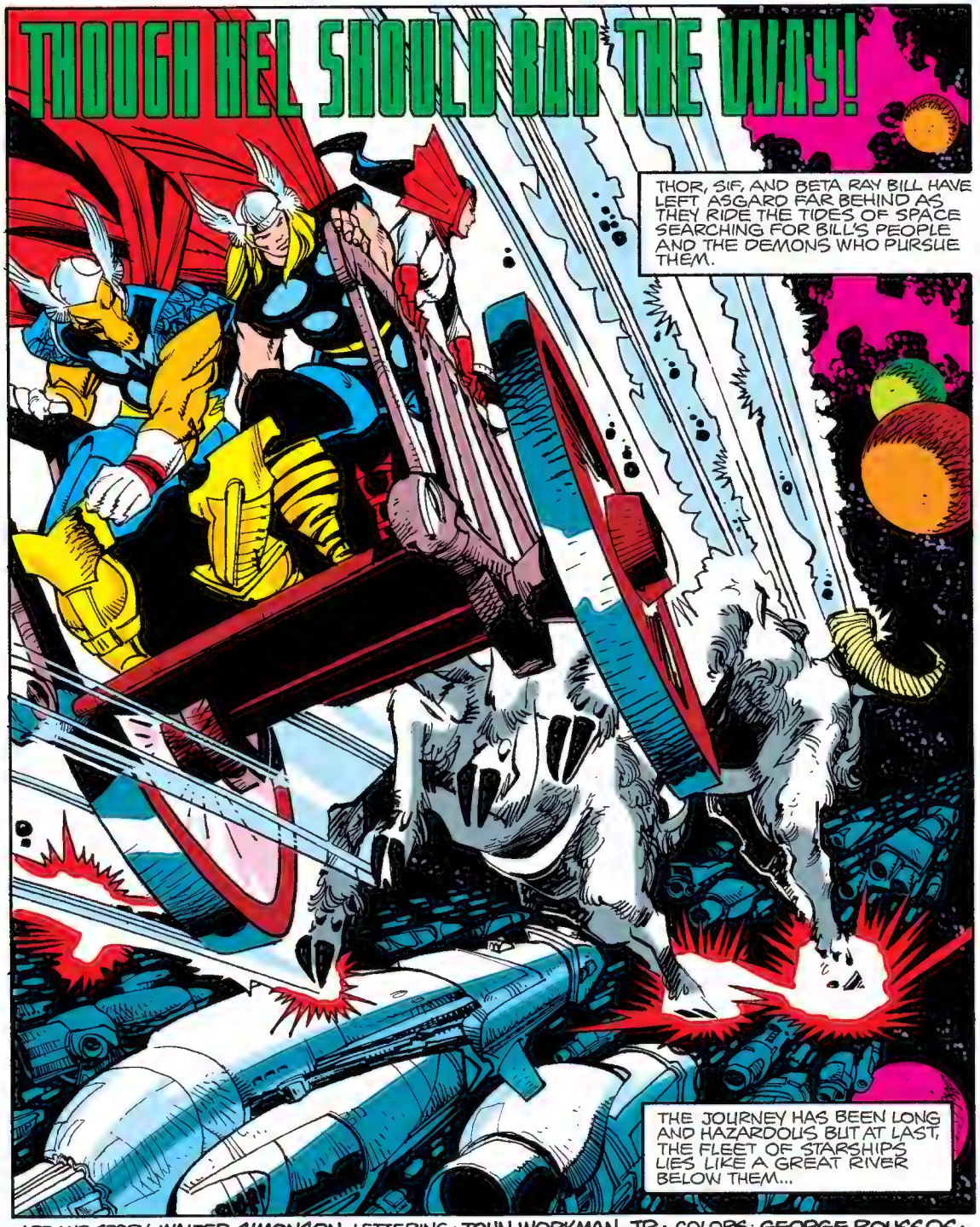
8-23-83

STAN LEE PRESENTS: the MIGHTY THOR®


THOUGH HEL SHOULD BAR THE WAY!
THOR, SIF, AND BETA RAY BILL HAVE LEFT ASGARD FAR BEHIND AS THEY RIDE THE TIDES OF SPACE SEARCHING FOR BILL'S PEOPLE AND THE DEMONS WHO PURSUE THEM.
THE JOURNEY HAS BEEN LONG AND HAZARDOUS BUT AT LAST, THE FLEET OF STARSHIPS LIES LIKE A GREAT RIVER BELOW THEM...

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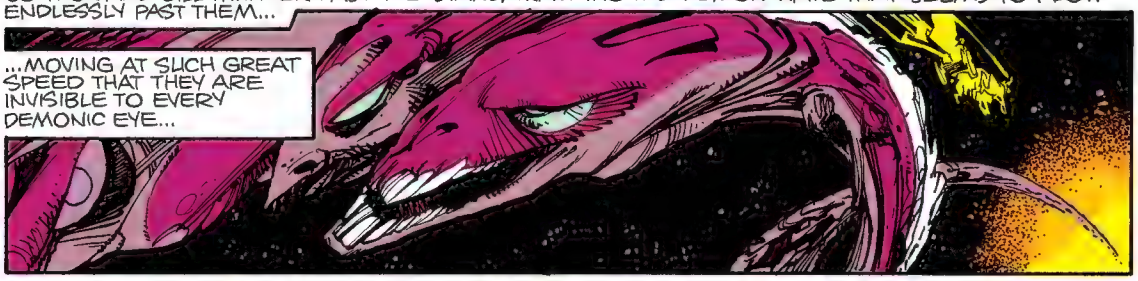
AND THE DEMONS ARE CLOSE AT HAND!
I SEE THEM! THEY HAVE CAUGHT THE LAST SHIP IN LINE!
MY PEOPLE! LOCKED IN COLD-SLEEP AS THEY WERE, THEY HAD NO CHANCE AGAINST THOSE CREATURES!
WE ARE TOO LATE!
TO SAVE THIS ONE SHIP...
WHARROOM!
... BUT WE WILL AVENGE THEM AS ONLY THE MIGHTIEST WARRIORS OF ASGARD CAN!
OUR HAMMERS SHALL STRIKE WITHOUT MERCY!
LADY SIF!

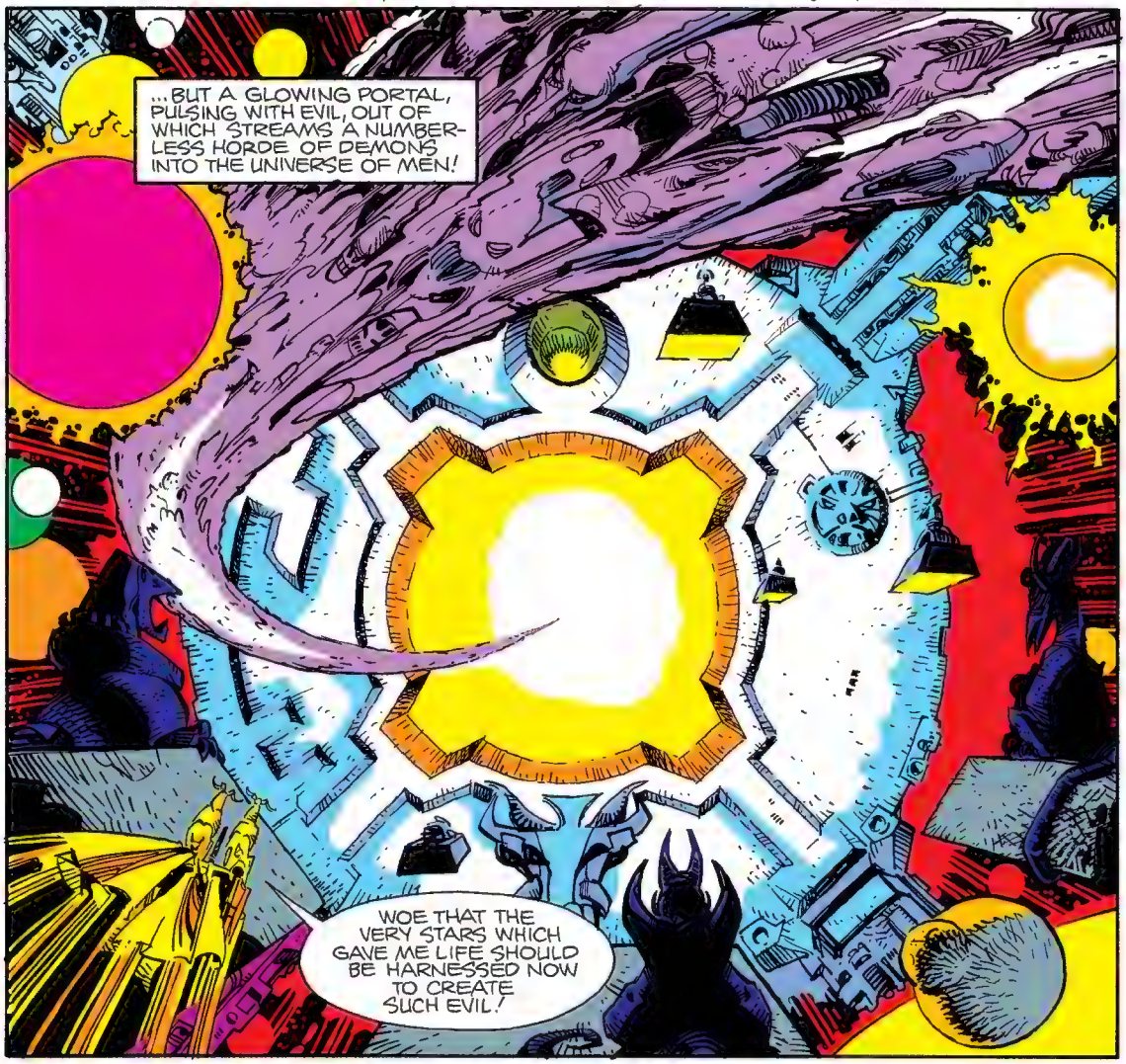
RIDE ON! RIDE ON! ODIN SAID THAT ONLY BY DESTROYING THE SOURCE OF THESE DEMONS CAN WE WIN THE BATTLE!
I WILL REMAIN HERE AND PROTECT THE FLEET UNTIL YOU CAN REACH THE DEMON'S CRADLE AND SHATTER IT!
BUT, SIF...
RIDE ON! DO NOT WASTE WHAT LITTLE TIME WE HAVE! FOLLOW THE DEMONS HOME AND DO WHAT MUST BE DONE!
PRO-TECTING BILL'S PEOPLE IS MY DUTY!
WE CANNOT LEAVE HER THUS!
NO, SHE IS RIGHT. ONLY YOU AND I MIGHT WIN AGAINST THE DEMON HORDES ON THEIR OWN GROUND.
AND WE MUST LEARN ALL WE CAN ABOUT THEM SINCE EVEN MY FATHER, ODIN, CANNOT SEE INTO THEIR DOMAIN TO LEARN THEIR PURPOSE.
ON, TOOTH-GNASHER! ON, TOOTH-GRINDER! RACE THE LIGHTNING!

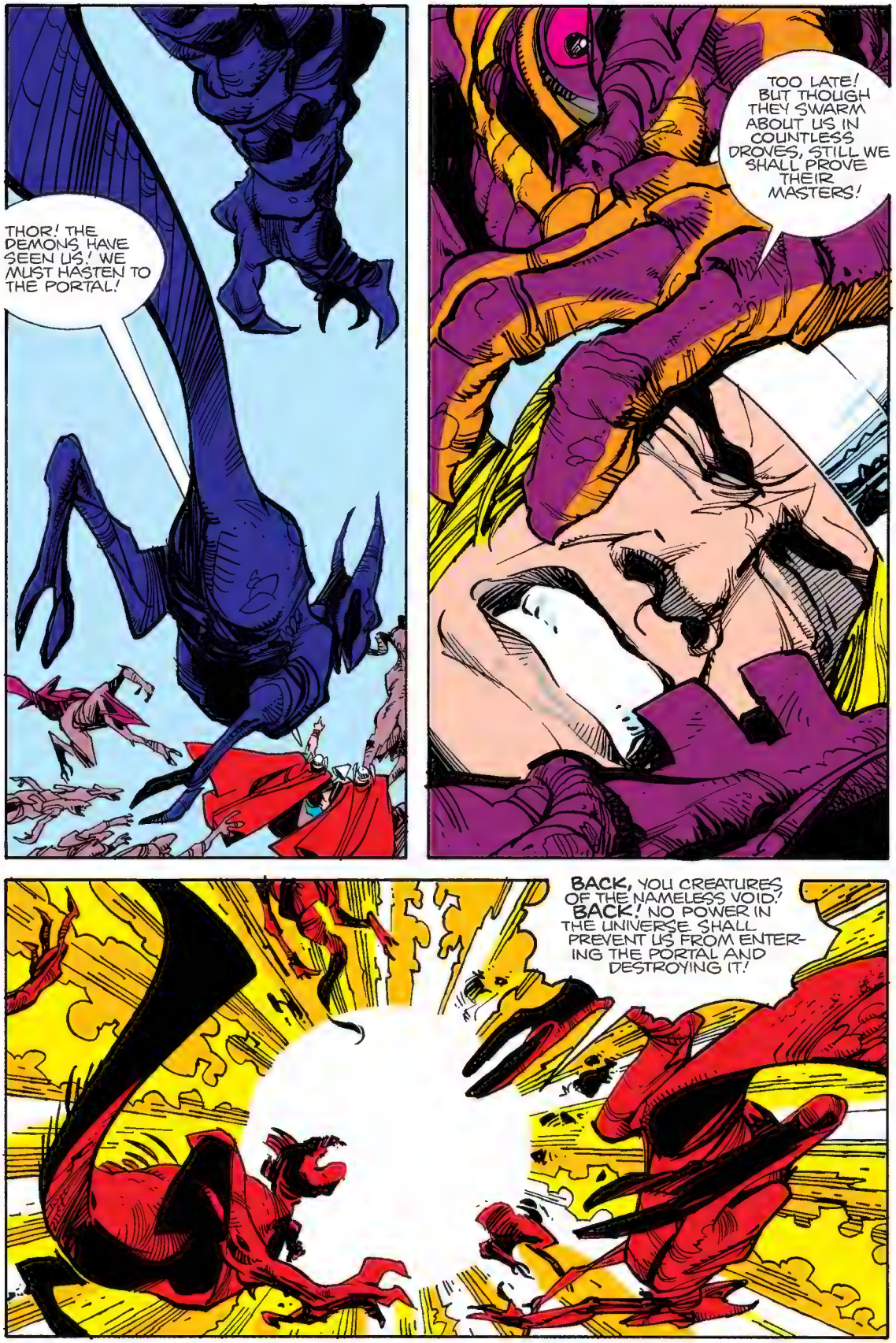
SO THOR AND BILL THUNDER PAST THE STARS, TRACKING THE DEMON WAVE THAT SEEMS TO FLOW ENDLESSLY PAST THEM...

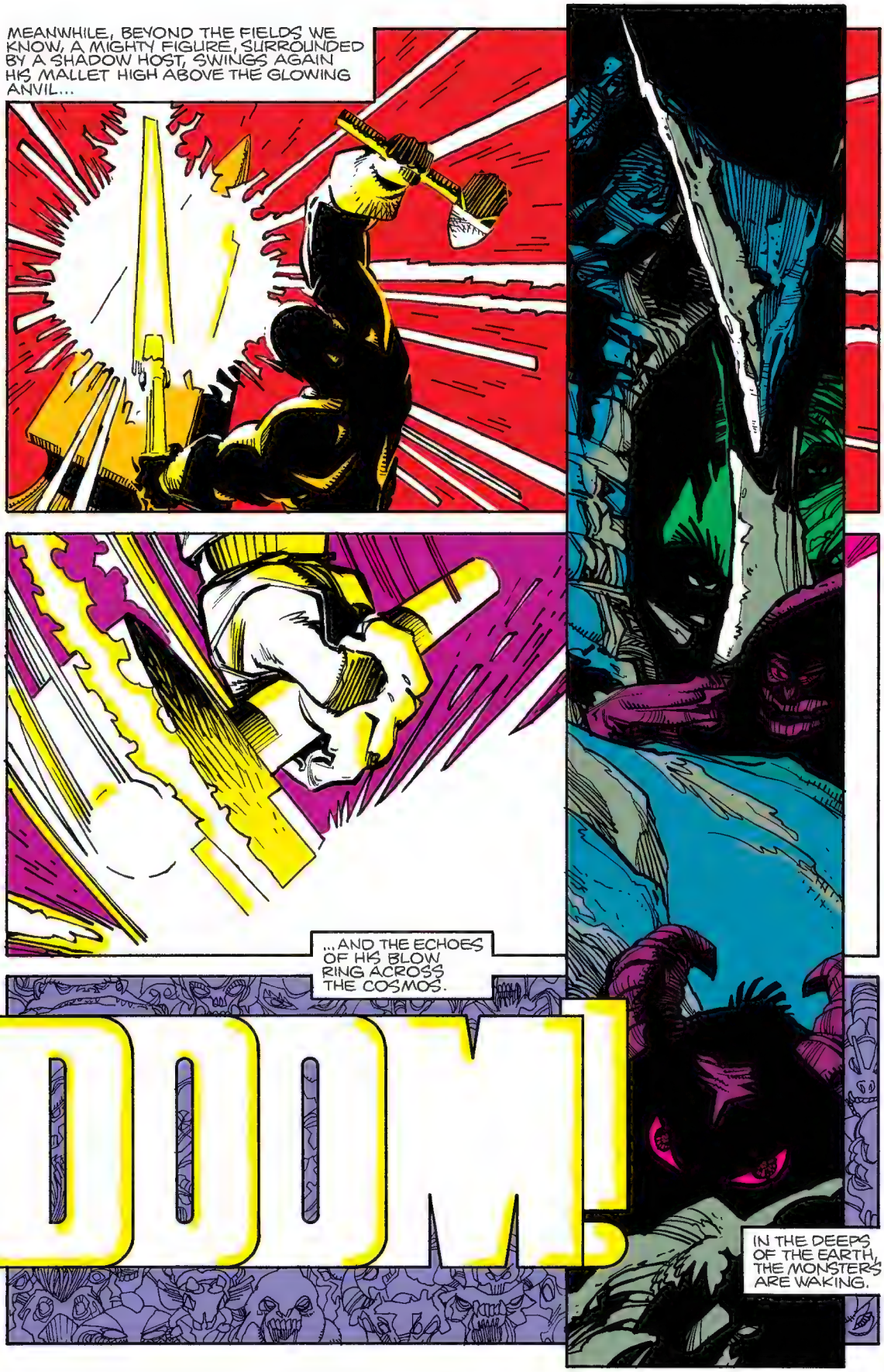


...UNTIL AT LAST THEY REACH THE CORE OF THE GALAXY THAT ONCE HOUSED THE CIVILIZATION OF BILL'S PEOPLE.

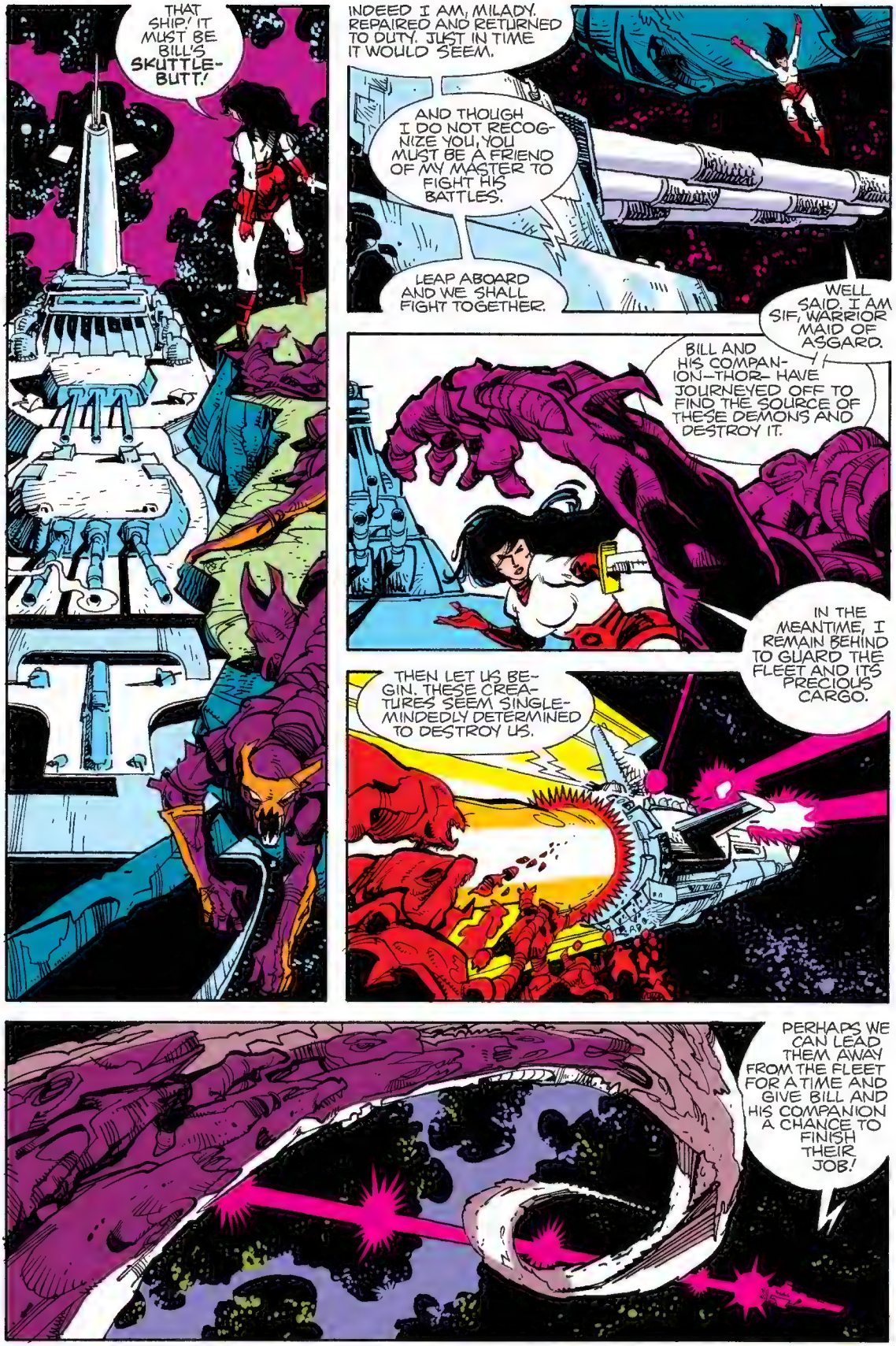
FOR BEFORE THEM LIE NOT THE RADIANT STARS OF AN ANCIENT AND WISE RACE...

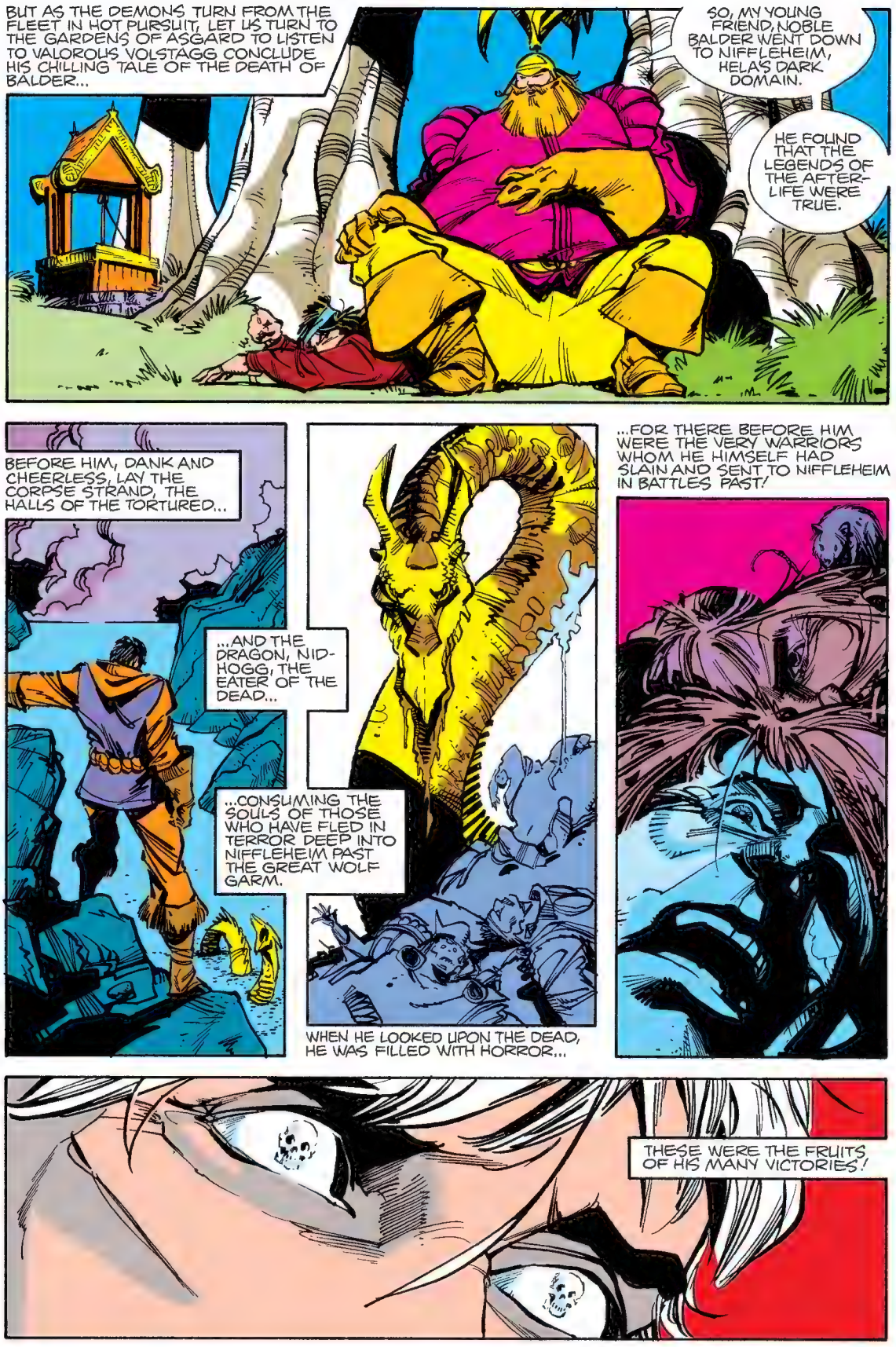

...BUT A GLOWING PORTAL, PULSING WITH EVIL, OUT OF WHICH STREAMS A NUMBERLESS HORDE OF DEMONS INTO THE UNIVERSE OF MEN!
WOE THAT THE VERY STARS WHICH GAVE ME LIFE SHOULD BE HARNESSED NOW TO CREATE SUCH EVIL!


THOR! THE DEMONS HAVE SEEN US! WE MUST HASTEN TO THE PORTAL!
TOO LATE! BUT THOUGH THEY SWARM ABOUT US IN COUNTLESS DROVES, STILL WE SHALL PROVE THEIR MASTERS!
BACK, YOU CREATURES OF THE NAMELESS VOID! BACK! NO POWER IN THE UNIVERSE SHALL PREVENT US FROM ENTERING THE PORTAL AND DESTROYING IT!

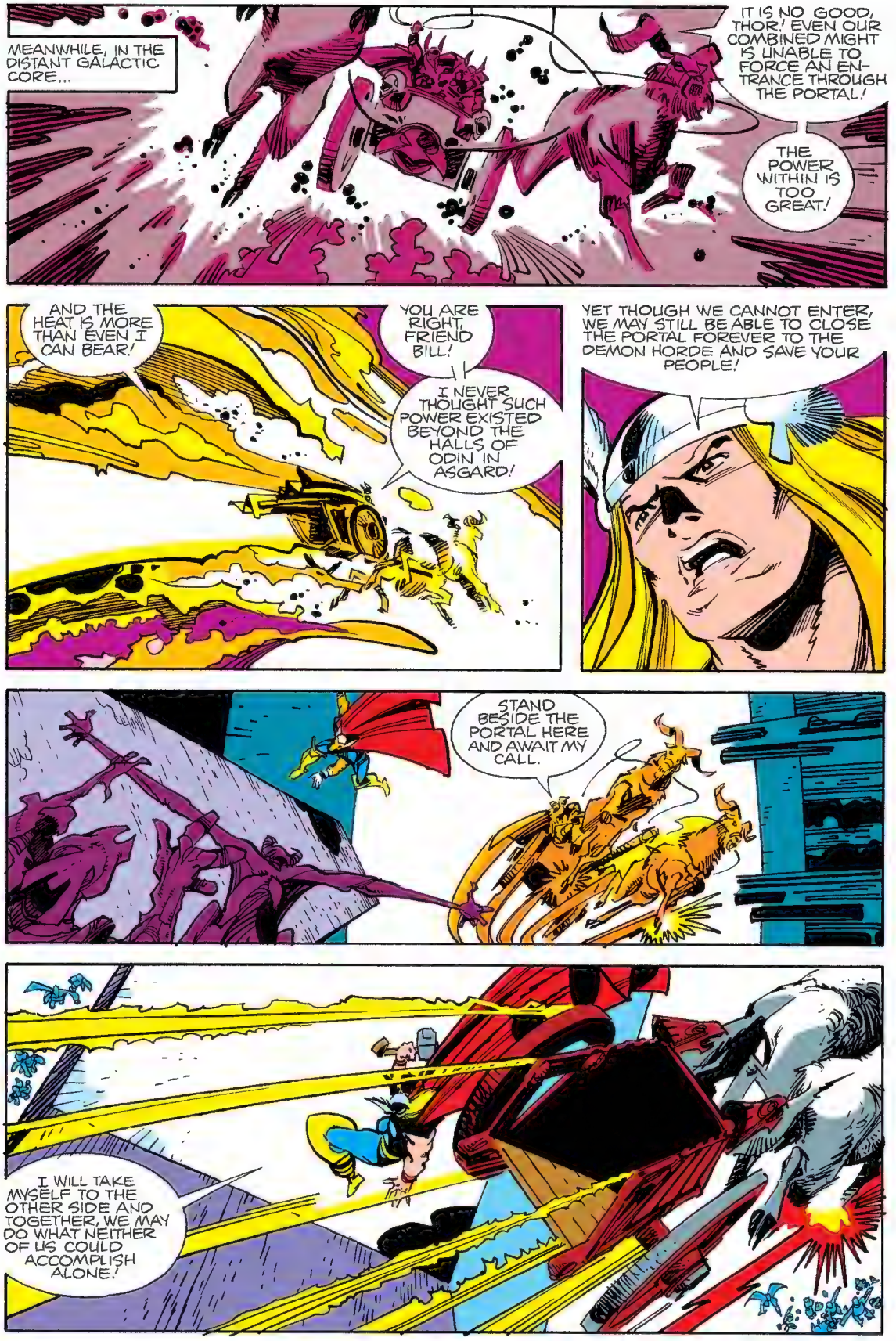

MEANWHILE, BEYOND THE FIELDS WE KNOW, A MIGHTY FIGURE, SURROUNDED BY A SHADOW HOST, SWINGS AGAIN HIS MALLET HIGH ABOVE THE GLOWING ANVIL...
...AND THE ECHOES OF HIS BLOW RING ACROSS THE COSMOS.
DOOM!
IN THE DEEPS OF THE EARTH, THE MONSTERS ARE WAKING.

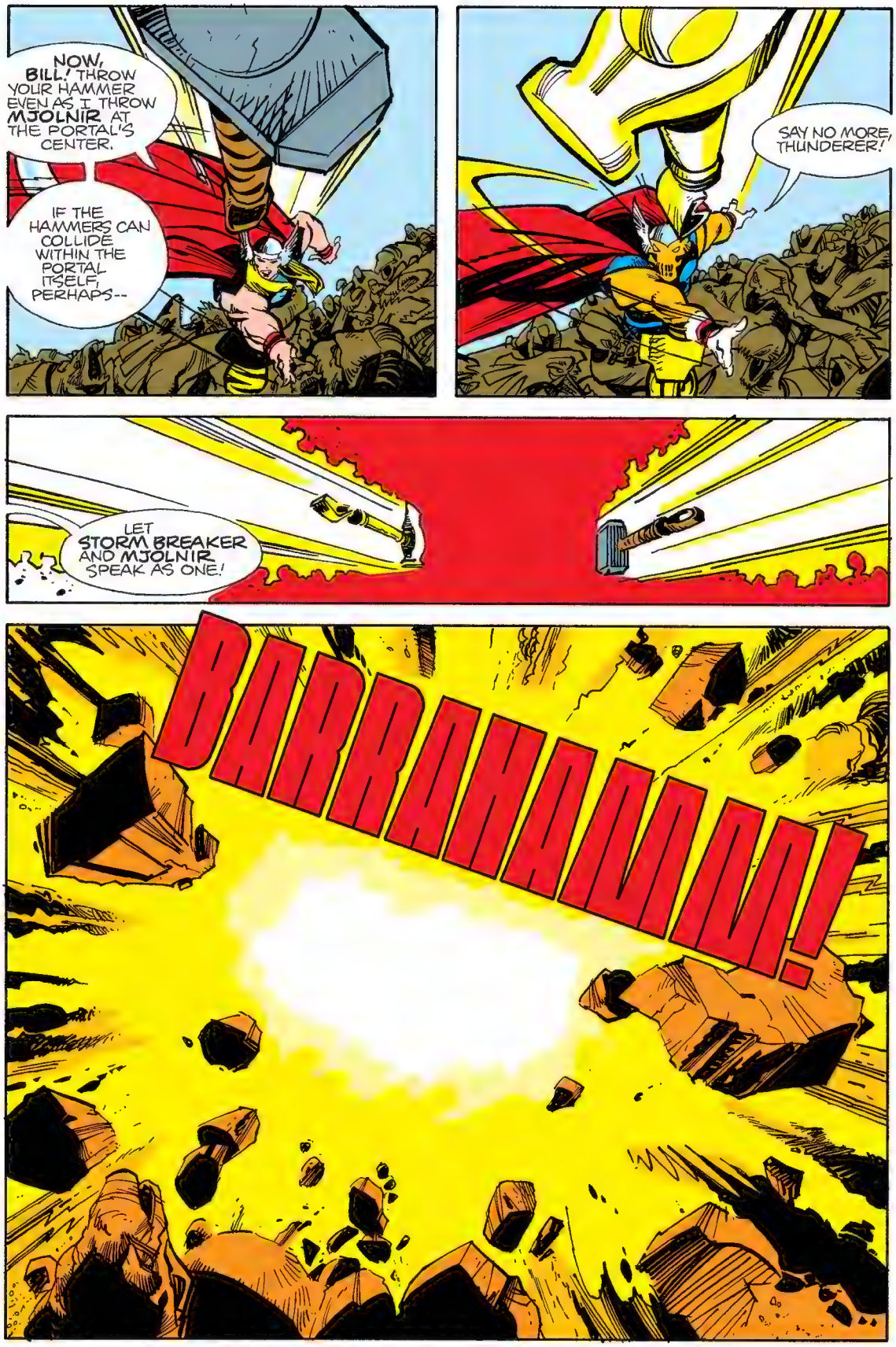
WHILE FAR AWAY, IN THE GREAT FLEET...
NO DEMON HAS YET GOTTEN PAST ME, BUT THEIR NUMBERS INCREASE WITH EVERY SECOND.
AND NOW THEY HAVE BEGUN TO MASS TOGETHER FOR THEIR FINAL ATTACK!
VERY WELL! IF TODAY I MUST JOURNEY TO THE HALLS OF HELA, I SHALL NOT TRAVEL ALONE!
COME, DEMONS! WHO WILL BE THE FIRST TO TASTE THIS SWEET STEEL?
BADDOOM! BADDOOM!
WHA--!


THAT SHIP! IT MUST BE BILL'S SKUTTLE-BUTT!
INDEED I AM, MILADY. REPAIRED AND RETURNED TO DUTY. JUST IN TIME IT WOULD SEEM.
AND THOUGH I DO NOT RECOGNIZE YOU, YOU MUST BE A FRIEND OF MY MASTER TO FIGHT HIS BATTLES.
LEAP ABOARD AND WE SHALL FIGHT TOGETHER.
WELL SAID. I AM SIF, WARRIOR MAID OF ASGARD.
BILL AND HIS COMPANION—THOR— HAVE JOURNEYED OFF TO FIND THE SOURCE OF THESE DEMONS AND DESTROY IT.
IN THE MEANTIME, I REMAIN BEHIND TO GUARD THE FLEET AND ITS PRECIOUS CARGO.
THEN LET US BEGIN. THESE CREATURES SEEM SINGLE-MINDEDLY DETERMINED TO DESTROY US.
PERHAPS WE CAN LEAD THEM AWAY FROM THE FLEET FOR A TIME AND GIVE BILL AND HIS COMPANION A CHANCE TO FINISH THEIR JOB!

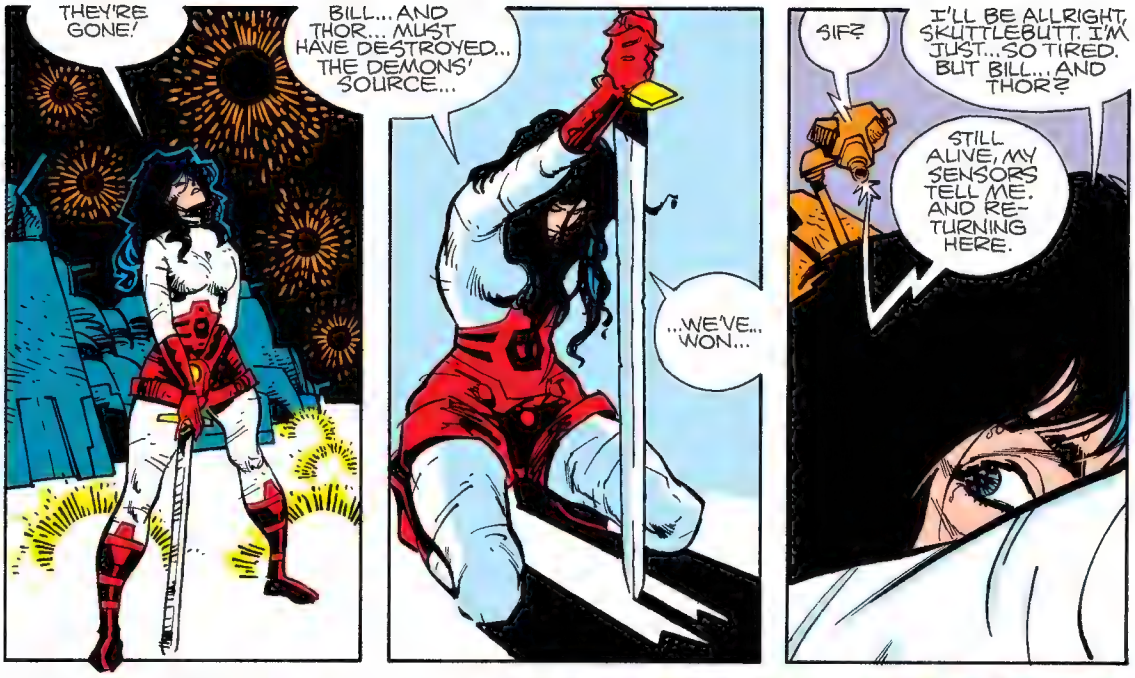

BUT AS THE DEMONS TURN FROM THE FLEET IN HOT PURSUIT, LET US TURN TO THE GARDENS OF ASGARD TO LISTEN TO VALOROUS VOLSTAGG CONCLUDE HIS CHILLING TALE OF THE DEATH OF BALDER...
SO, MY YOUNG FRIEND, NOBLE BALDER WENT DOWN TO NIFFLEHEIM, HELA'S DARK DOMAIN.
HE FOUND THAT THE LEGENDS OF THE AFTER-LIFE WERE TRUE.
BEFORE HIM, DANK AND CHEERLESS, LAY THE CORPSE STRAND, THE HALLS OF THE TORTURED...
...AND THE DRAGON, NIDHOGG, THE EATER OF THE DEAD...
...CONSUMING THE SOULS OF THOSE WHO HAVE FLED IN TERROR DEEP INTO NIFFLEHEIM PAST THE GREAT WOLF GARM.
WHEN HE LOOKED UPON THE DEAD, HE WAS FILLED WITH HORROR...
...FOR THERE BEFORE HIM WERE THE VERY WARRIORS WHOM HE HIMSELF HAD SLAIN AND SENT TO NIFFLEHEIM IN BATTLES PAST!
THESE WERE THE FRUITS OF HIS MANY VICTORIES!

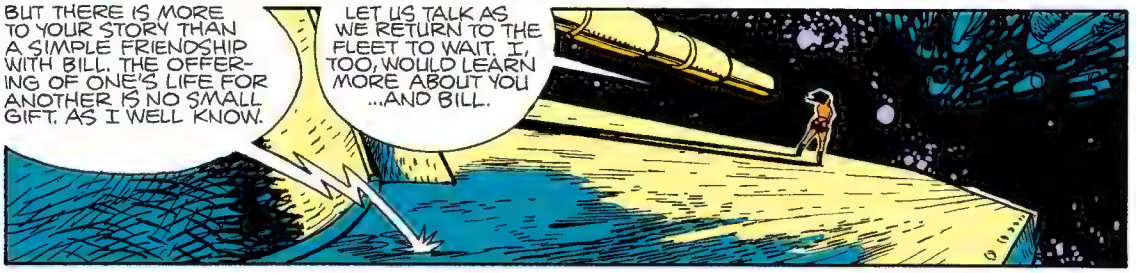
AND THERE WAS WORSE, MUCH OF WHICH BALDER FOUND HIMSELF UNABLE TO RELATE, EVEN TO ME.
FOR ALL HIS PROWESS IN BATTLE, YOUNG AGNAR, BALDER IS A GENTLE SOUL, A POET IN A WARRIOR'S BODY.
NOT LIKE THOR OR MYSELF WHO LIVE ONLY FOR THE SOUND OF CLASHING BLADES AND SMOKING BATTLEFIELDS.
OF COURSE I HAVE—UMMPH—GROWN SO—UGGH—LARGE THAT NO ORDINARY FOE IS WORTHY OF MY GREAT ABILITIES.
GROAN.
SURELY IF SOME HARM CAME NOW TO BALDER AND YOU WERE RESPONSIBLE, WHY I MIGHT EVEN FIND IT IN MY HEART, SO MUCH LARGER THAN THAT OF ORDINARY MEN, TO FORGIVE YOU.
LET ME DUST YOU OFF.
Paf Paf
OWOWOW.
WHY, EVEN THOR OR FANDRAL THE DASHING MIGHT FORGIVE YOU BECAUSE THEY WERE ONCE YOUNG AND DARING THEMSELVES.
POMPOUS OLD WINDBAG!
BUT HOGUN THE GRIM?
URK!
HOGUN WAS NEVER YOUNG. HE WOULD NEVER FORGET...
...OR FORGIVE!


MEANWHILE, IN THE DISTANT GALACTIC CORE...
IT IS NO GOOD, THOR! EVEN OUR COMBINED MIGHT IS UNABLE TO FORCE AN ENTRANCE THROUGH THE PORTAL!
THE POWER WITHIN IS TOO GREAT!
AND THE HEAT IS MORE THAN EVEN I CAN BEAR!
YOU ARE RIGHT, FRIEND BILL!
I NEVER THOUGHT SUCH POWER EXISTED BEYOND THE HALLS OF ODIN IN ASGARD!
YET THOUGH WE CANNOT ENTER, WE MAY STILL BE ABLE TO CLOSE THE PORTAL FOREVER TO THE DEMON HORDE AND SAVE YOUR PEOPLE!
STAND BESIDE THE PORTAL HERE AND AWAIT MY CALL.
I WILL TAKE MYSELF TO THE OTHER SIDE AND TOGETHER, WE MAY DO WHAT NEITHER OF US COULD ACCOMPLISH ALONE!

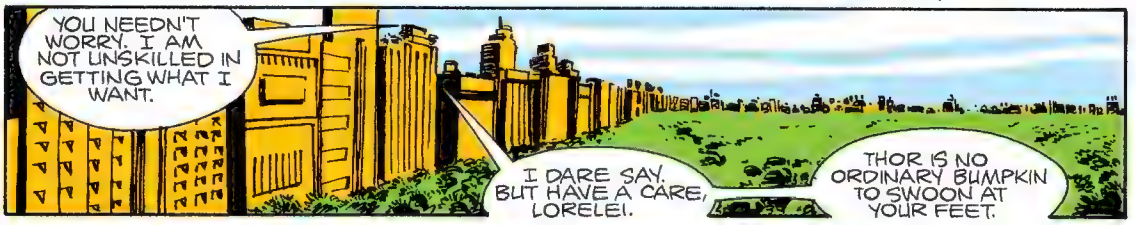

NOW, BILL! THROW YOUR HAMMER EVEN AS I THROW MJOLNIR AT THE PORTAL'S CENTER.
IF THE HAMMERS CAN COLLIDE WITHIN THE PORTAL ITSELF, PERHAPS--
SAY NO MORE, THUNDERER!
LET STORM BREAKER AND MJOLNIR SPEAK AS ONE!
BARRAHOOOM!

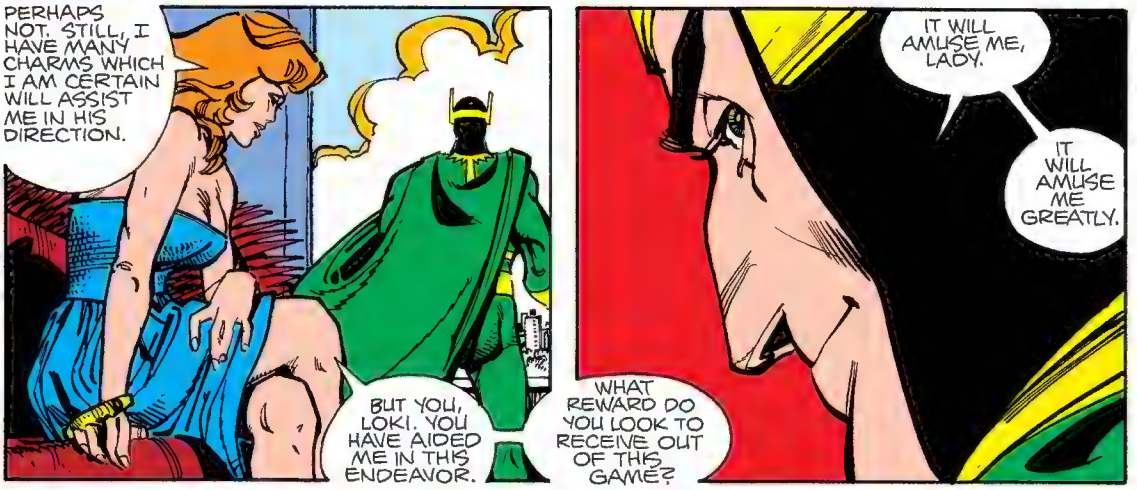
MEANWHILE, ABOARD THE SKUTTLEBUTT...
THEIR NUMBERS ONLY INCREASE! FOR EVERY DEMON WE SLAY, A DOZEN MORE ATTACK!
THEN I HAVE NO CHOICE, SIF! I MUST PROTECT MY CHARGES!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
SELF-DESTRUCTION! AS THE DEMONS OVERWHELM US, I SHALL DESTROY MYSELF AND THIS ENTIRE SECTOR OF SPACE, TAKING THOUSANDS OF DEMONS WITH ME.
DO YOU WISH TO ESCAPE?
I COULD NOT DESERT SUCH A FRIEND. BUT WE SHALL GIVE THEM SOMETHING THEY'LL NEVER FORGET!
HERE THEY COME!
COUNT-DOWN BEGUN!
FIVE!
FOUR!
THREE!
TWO!
O--!
SKUTTLEBUTT! WAIT!
THE DEMONS! THEY'RE DISAPPEARING!

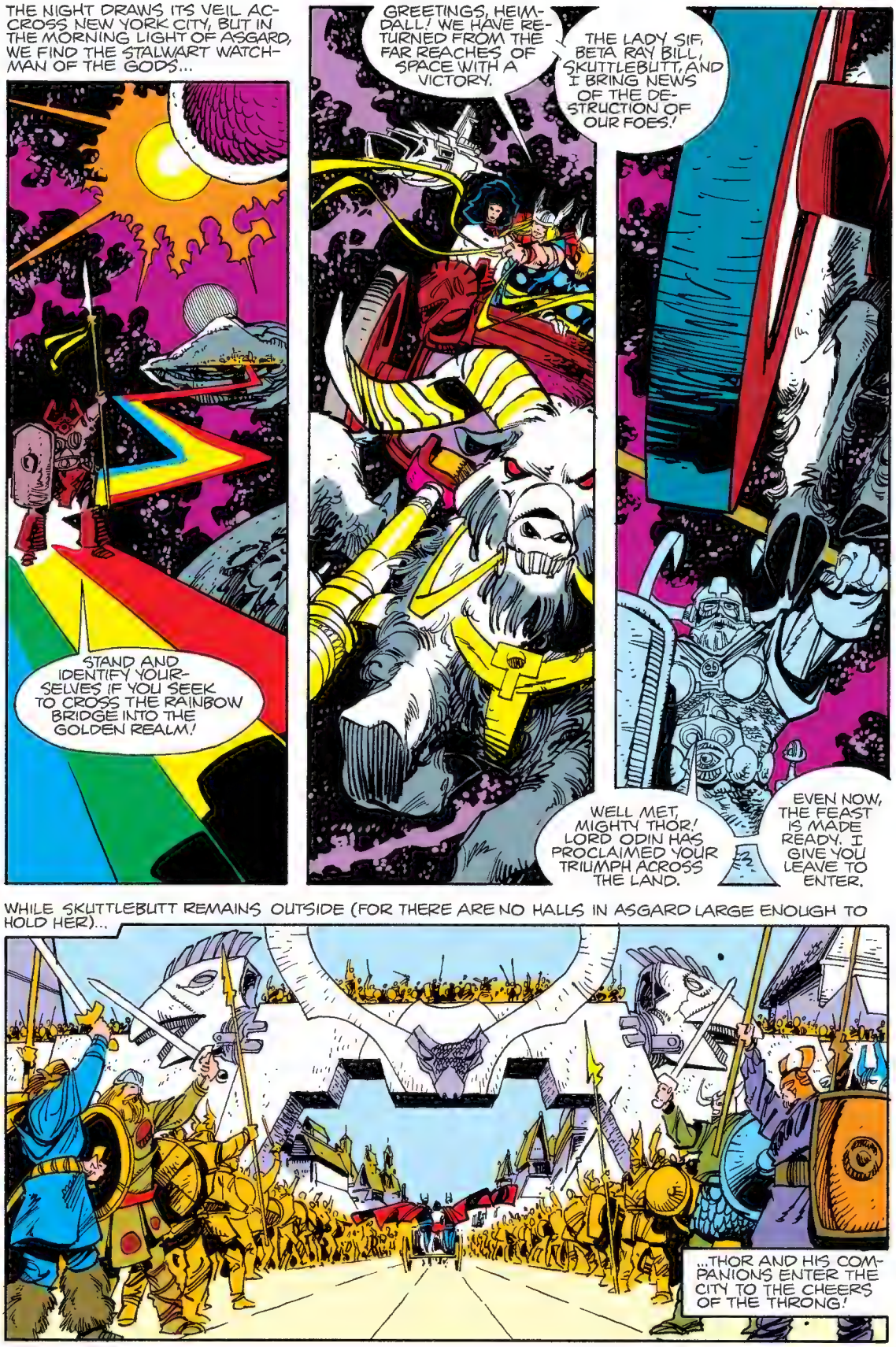

THEY'RE GONE!
BILL... AND THOR... MUST HAVE DESTROYED... THE DEMONS' SOURCE...
..WE'VE... WON...
SIF?
I'LL BE ALLRIGHT, SKUTTLEBUTT. I'M JUST...SO TIRED. BUT BILL... AND THOR?
STILL ALIVE, MY SENSORS TELL ME. AND RE-TURNING HERE.

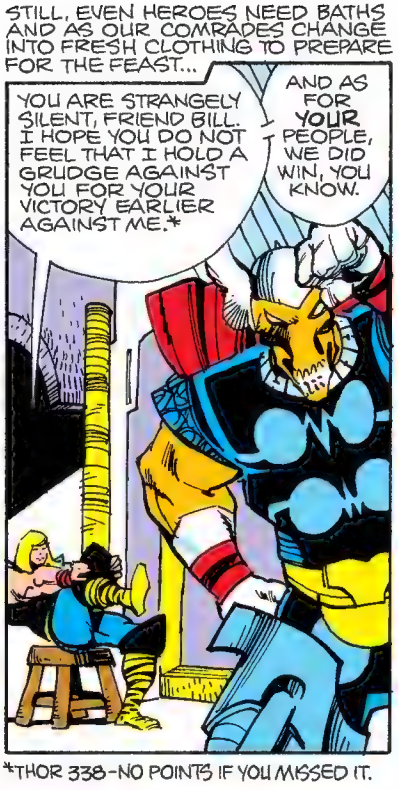

BUT THERE IS MORE TO YOUR STORY THAN A SIMPLE FRIENDSHIP WITH BILL. THE OFFER-ING OF ONE'S LIFE FOR ANOTHER IS NO SMALL GIFT. AS I WELL KNOW.
LET US TALK AS WE RETURN TO THE FLEET TO WAIT. I, TOO, WOULD LEARN MORE ABOUT YOU ...AND BILL.

AT THAT MOMENT, IN A PENTHOUSE OVERLOOKING CENTRAL PARK IN NEW YORK CITY...


YOU NEEDN'T WORRY. I AM NOT UNSKILLED IN GETTING WHAT I WANT.
I DARE SAY. BUT HAVE A CARE, LORELEI.
THOR IS NO ORDINARY BUMPKIN TO SWOON AT YOUR FEET.

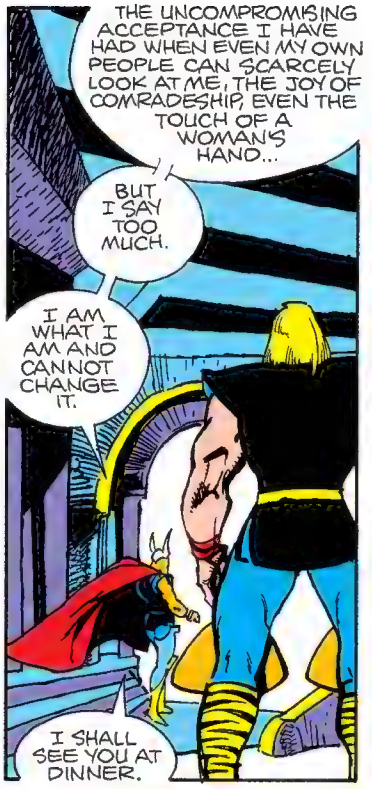

PERHAPS NOT. STILL, I HAVE MANY CHARMS WHICH I AM CERTAIN WILL ASSIST ME IN HIS DIRECTION.
BUT YOU, LOKI, YOU HAVE AIDED ME IN THIS ENDEAVOR.
WHAT REWARD DO YOU LOOK TO RECEIVE OUT OF THIS GAME?
IT WILL AMUSE ME, LADY.
IT WILL AMUSE ME GREATLY.


THE NIGHT DRAWS ITS VEIL ACCROSS NEW YORK CITY, BUT IN THE MORNING LIGHT OF ASGARD, WE FIND THE STALWART WATCHMAN OF THE GODS...
STAND AND IDENTIFY YOURSELVES IF YOU SEEK TO CROSS THE RAINBOW BRIDGE INTO THE GOLDEN REALM!
GREETINGS, HEIMDALL! WE HAVE RETURNED FROM THE FAR REACHES OF SPACE WITH A VICTORY.
THE LADY SIF, BETA RAY BILL, SKUTTLEBUTT, AND I BRING NEWS OF THE DESTRUCTION OF OUR FOES!
WELL MET, MIGHTY THOR! LORD ODIN HAS PROCLAIMED YOUR TRIUMPH ACROSS THE LAND.
EVEN NOW, THE FEAST IS MADE READY. I GIVE YOU LEAVE TO ENTER.
WHILE SKUTTLEBUTT REMAINS OUTSIDE (FOR THERE ARE NO HALLS IN ASGARD LARGE ENOUGH TO HOLD HER)...
...THOR AND HIS COMPANIONS ENTER THE CITY TO THE CHEERS OF THE THRONG!

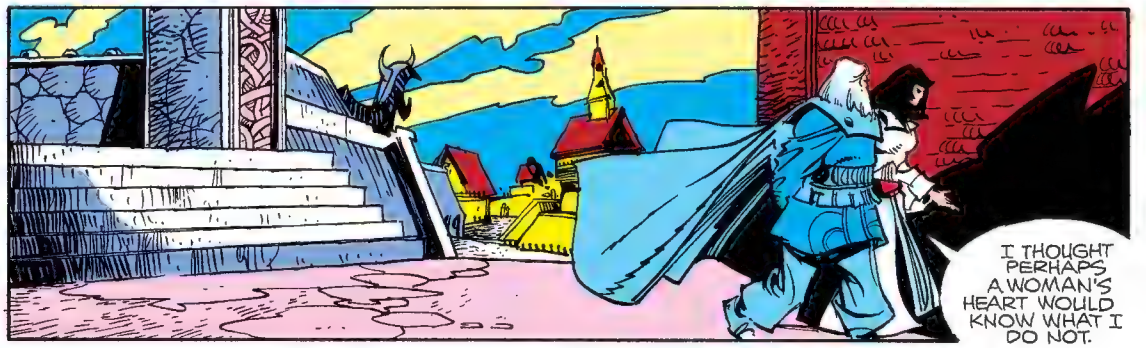

STILL, EVEN HEROES NEED BATHS AND AS OUR COMRADES CHANGE INTO FRESH CLOTHING TO PREPARE FOR THE FEAST...
YOU ARE STRANGELY SILENT, FRIEND BILL.. I HOPE YOU DO NOT FEEL THAT I HOLD A GRUDGE AGAINST YOU FOR YOUR VICTORY EARLIER AGAINST ME.*
AND AS FOR YOUR PEOPLE, WE DID WIN, YOU KNOW.

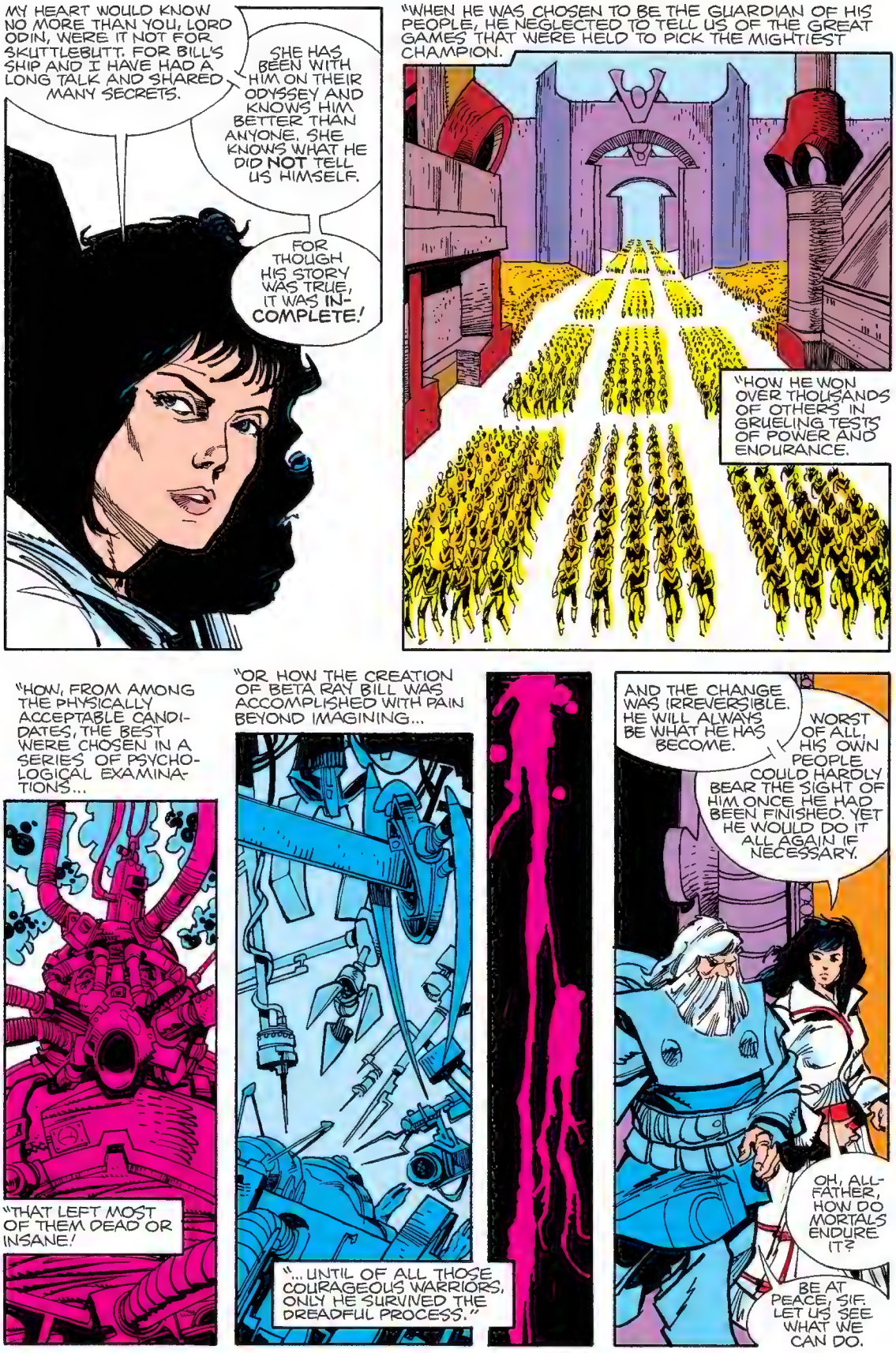
*THOR 338-NO POINTS IF YOU MISSED IT.

FEAR NOT, MY FRIEND. YOUR FRIENDSHIP IS BEYOND REPROACH. AS IS OUR VICTORY.
BUT I MUST SHORTLY RETURN TO GUIDE MY PEOPLE TO A NEW HOME AND THOUGH I CAN HARDLY BELIEVE IT, I AM LOATH TO LEAVE ASGARD...
...AND ALL THAT I HAVE FOUND HERE.


THE UNCOMPROMISING ACCEPTANCE I HAVE HAD WHEN EVEN MY OWN PEOPLE CAN SCARCELY LOOK AT ME, THE JOY OF COMRADESHIP, EVEN THE TOUCH OF A WOMAN'S HAND...
BUT I SAY TOO MUCH.
I AM WHAT I AM AND CANNOT CHANGE IT.
I SHALL SEE YOU AT DINNER.

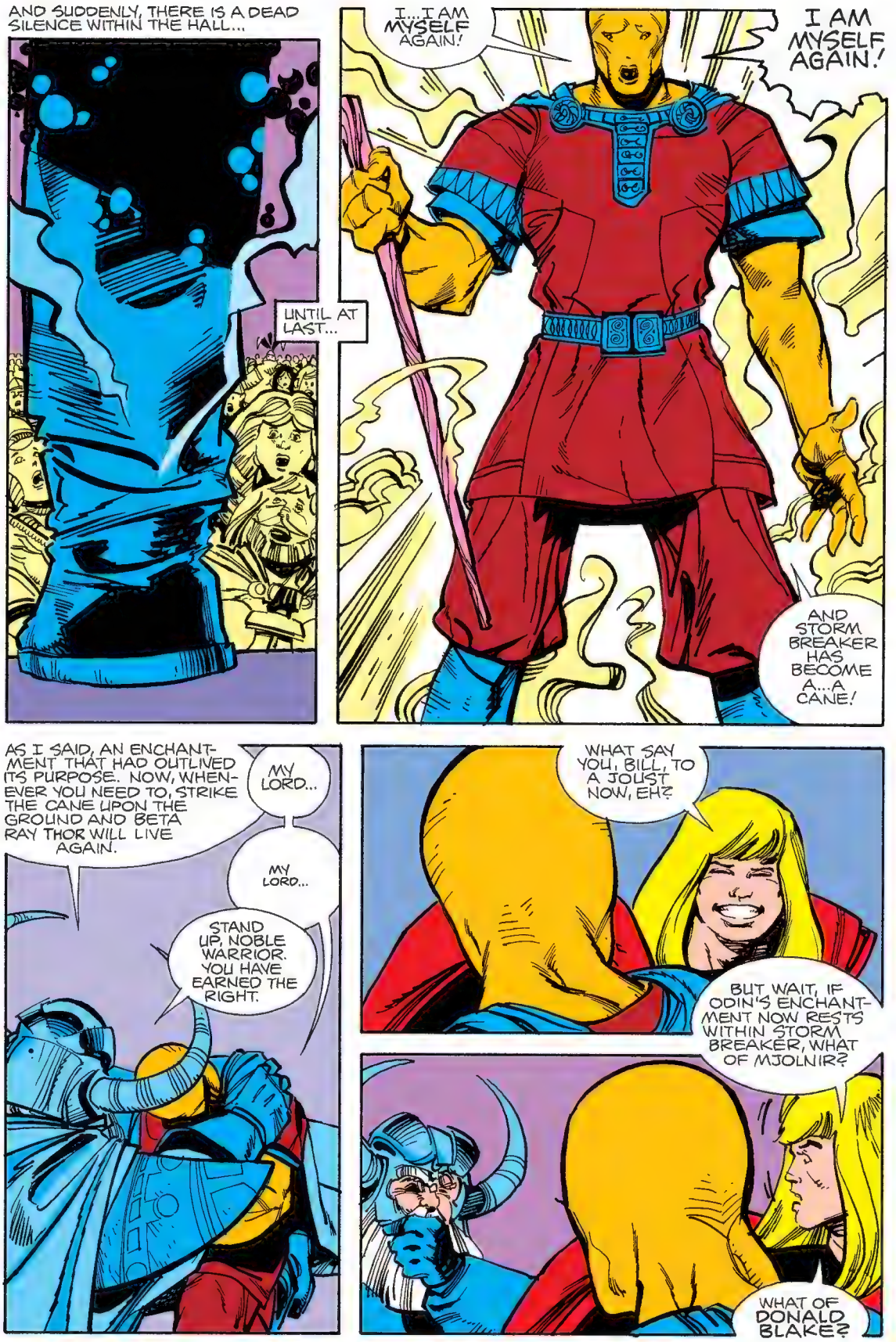
I KNOW MORE THAN YOU MIGHT THINK, LADY, ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS FOR HIM. I, TOO, FIND HIM A MATCH FOR MY OWN SON IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE.
BUT THERE IS IN BILL A CORE OF MELANCHOLY THAT EVEN I CANNOT FATHOM.




MY HEART WOULD KNOW NO MORE THAN YOU, LORD ODIN, WERE IT NOT FOR SKUTTLEBUTT. FOR BILL'S SHIP AND I HAVE HAD A LONG TALK AND SHARED MANY SECRETS.
SHE HAS BEEN WITH HIM ON THEIR ODYSSEY AND KNOWS HIM BETTER THAN ANYONE. SHE KNOWS WHAT HE DID NOT TELL US HIMSELF.
FOR THOUGH HIS STORY WAS TRUE, IT WAS IN-COMPLETE!
"WHEN HE WAS CHOSEN TO BE THE GUARDIAN OF HIS PEOPLE, HE NEGLECTED TO TELL US OF THE GREAT GAMES THAT WERE HELD TO PICK THE MIGHTIEST CHAMPION.
"HOW HE WON OVER THOUSANDS OF OTHERS IN GRUELING TESTS OF POWER AND ENDURANCE.
"HOW, FROM AMONG THE PHYSICALLY ACCEPTABLE CANDI-DATES, THE BEST WERE CHOSEN IN A SERIES OF PSYCHO-LOGICAL EXAMINA-TIONS...
"OR HOW THE CREATION OF BETA RAY BILL WAS ACCOMPLISHED WITH PAIN BEYOND IMAGINING...
"THAT LEFT MOST OF THEM DEAD OR INSANE!
"... UNTIL OF ALL THOSE COURAGEOUS WARRIORS, ONLY HE SURVIVED THE DREADFUL PROCESS."
AND THE CHANGE WAS IRREVERSIBLE. HE WILL ALWAYS BE WHAT HE HAS BECOME.
WORST OF ALL, HIS OWN PEOPLE COULD HARDLY BEAR THE SIGHT OF HIM ONCE HE HAD BEEN FINISHED. YET HE WOULD DO IT ALL AGAIN IF NECESSARY.
OH, ALL-FATHER, HOW DO MORTALS ENDURE IT?
BE AT PEACE, SIF. LET US SEE WHAT WE CAN DO.

THAT EVENING, AFTER THE FEASTING IS NEARLY THROUGH...
LET ALL NOW BE SILENT! LORD ODIN WOULD ADDRESS THE HEROES!
MY CHILDREN, WE STAND NOW TO HONOR THESE TWO WHO HAVE GONE TO THE ENDS OF THE UNIVERSE AND RETURNED VICTORIOUS.
WHAT CAN WE GIVE SUCH WARRIORS THAT THEY DO NOT ALREADY POSSESS?
VERY LITTLE, FOR THE TRUE WARRIOR CARRIES WITHIN HIMSELF ALL THAT IS NECESSARY.
YET MY HEART TELLS ME THAT WE MAY STAND HERE TOGETHER FOR THE LAST TIME AND SOME TOKEN, TO REMIND A DISTANT TRAVELER OF HIS FRIENDS, SEEMS APPROPRIATE.
STEP FORWARD AND RAISE YOUR HAMMERS THAT I MAY BESTOW UPON YOU EACH A GIFT THAT I HOPE WILL BE WORTHY OF YOU.

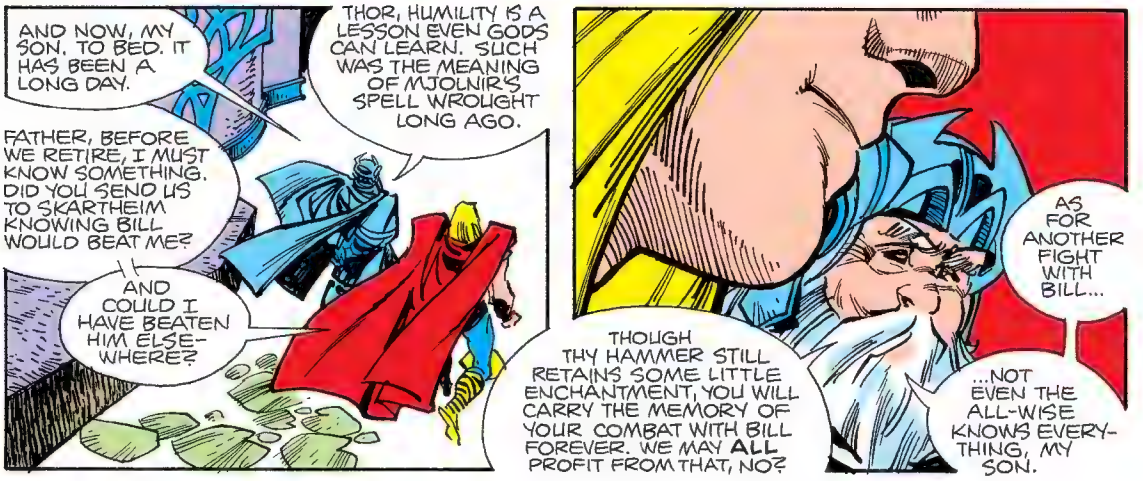
TO YOU, MY SON, AND TO YOU, BILL, LET EACH RECEIVE WHAT IS NEEDFUL.
SO SPEAKS ODIN!
KRACALACTAKA!
I... I FEEL NO DIFFERENT!
PERHAPS NOT. BUT I HAD AN OLD ENCHANTMENT THAT HAS OUTLIVED ITS ORIGINAL PURPOSE.
WITH MINOR ALTERATIONS, I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT FIND IT USEFUL.
STRIKE YOUR HAMMER, STORM BREAKER, UPON THE GROUND.
GO ON!
STRIKE IT!
BARROOM!


AND SUDDENLY, THERE IS A DEAD SILENCE WITHIN THE HALL...
UNTIL AT LAST...
I...I AM MYSELF AGAIN!
I AM MYSELF AGAIN!
AND STORM BREAKER HAS BECOME A...A CANE!
AS I SAID, AN ENCHANTMENT THAT HAD OUTLIVED ITS PURPOSE. NOW, WHENEVER YOU NEED TO, STRIKE THE CANE UPON THE GROUND AND BETA RAY THOR WILL LIVE AGAIN.
MY LORD...
MY LORD...
STAND UP, NOBLE WARRIOR. YOU HAVE EARNED THE RIGHT.
WHAT SAY YOU, BILL, TO A JOUST NOW, EH?
BUT WAIT, IF ODIN'S ENCHANTMENT NOW RESTS WITHIN STORM BREAKER, WHAT OF MJOLNIR?
WHAT OF DONALD BLAKE?

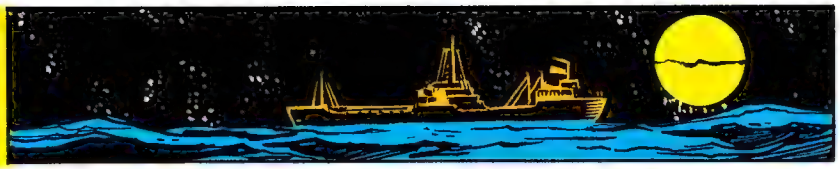
HEAR ME, HOSTS OF ASGARD!
PRAISE THESE HEROES! BILL, WHO HAS BECOME THE SECOND SON I NEVER HAD!
AND THOR, WHO IS NOW AND FOREVER, INDIVISIBLY, THE FIRST SON OF ODIN, THE GOD OF THUNDER AND HEIR TO THE THRONE OF ASGARD!
THE CHEERING LASTS A LONG, LONG TIME.

BUT THOUGH THE FEAST RENEWS ITSELF AND LASTS BEYOND THE COCK'S CROW, AT LENGTH THE THRONGS DISPERSE AND GOODBYES ARE SAID.

I MUST GO, THOR! AS A WARRIOR MAIDEN, I HAVE BECOME BLUNT AND DULLED. I HAVE EVEN BELIEVED THINGS THAT I AM SURE NOW WERE BUT BETRAYALS OF MY EYES.
ON BILL'S QUEST, I MAY REGAIN MY TEMPER AS I NEVER COULD ON MIDGARD.*
DO NOT FORGET ME.
LADY, SOONER COULD I FORGET MY OWN NAME.
*EARTH
MAY YOU AND YOURS BE GRANTED SAFE HAVEN, BILL.
STAND TOGETHER AND I WILL SEND YOU TO YOUR SHIP THAT WAITS BEYOND THE RAINBOW BRIDGE.
FARE THEE WELL!

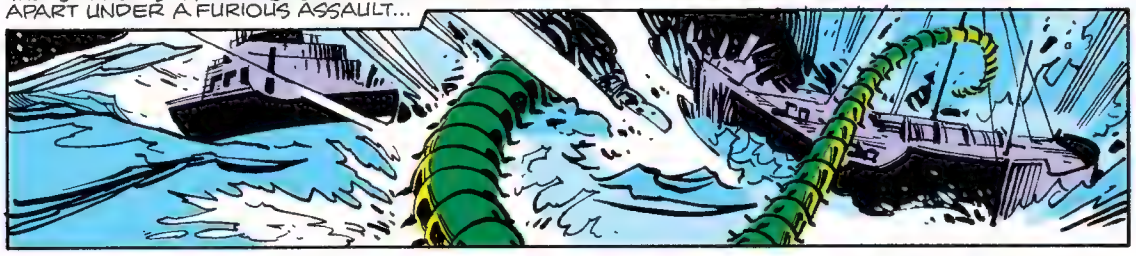

AND NOW, MY SON. TO BED. IT HAS BEEN A LONG DAY.
THOR, HUMILITY IS A LESSON EVEN GODS CAN LEARN. SUCH WAS THE MEANING OF MJOLNIR'S SPELL WROUGHT LONG AGO.
FATHER, BEFORE WE RETIRE, I MUST KNOW SOMETHING. DID YOU SEND US TO SKARTHEIM KNOWING BILL WOULD BEAT ME?
AND COULD I HAVE BEATEN HIM ELSEWHERE?
THOUGH THY HAMMER STILL RETAINS SOME LITTLE ENCHANTMENT, YOU WILL CARRY THE MEMORY OF YOUR COMBAT WITH BILL FOREVER. WE MAY ALL PROFIT FROM THAT, NO?
AS FOR ANOTHER FIGHT WITH BILL...
...NOT EVEN THE ALL-WISE KNOWS EVERYTHING, MY SON.

AS NIGHT FALLS IN ASGARD, SO TOO IT BLANKETS EARTH BUT THE LARGE TANKER ASTRAGLIA, OFF CAPE COD AND BOUND FOR THE ST. LAWRENCE MOVES STEADILY ON UNDER THE STARRY SKY...

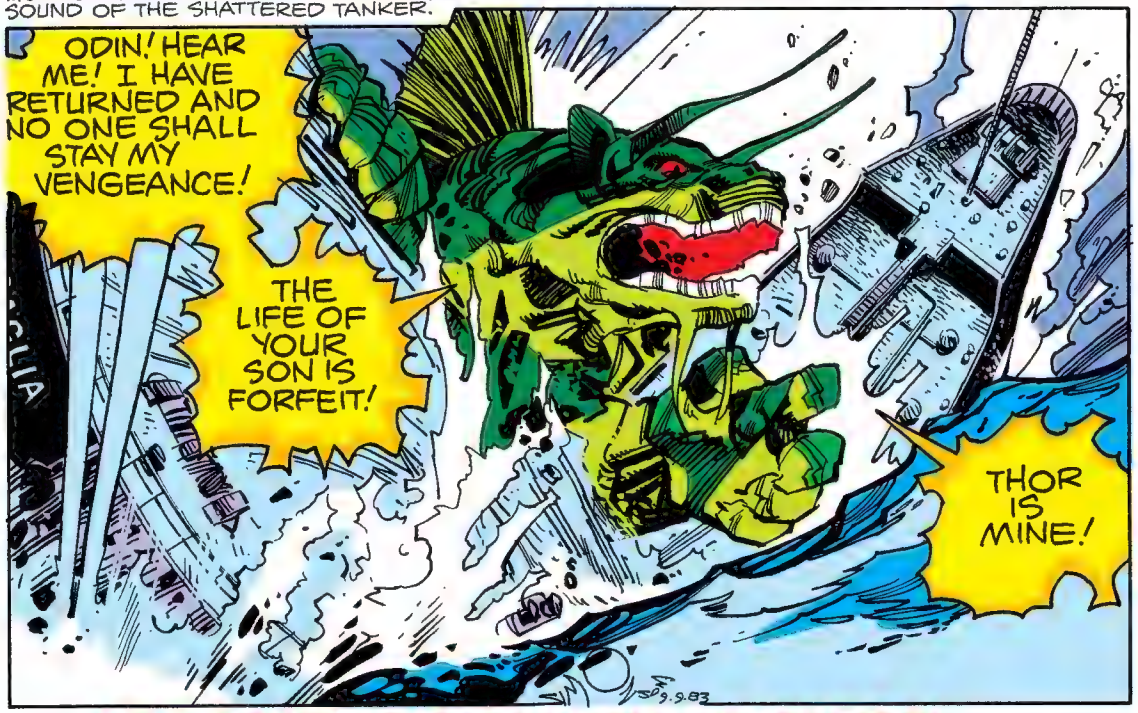


CALM NIGHT TONIGHT, EH, SKIPPER?
JUST A MILK RUN. DO YOU FEEL A SWELL?
NOT LIKELY ON A SHIP THIS SIZE. MAYBE YOU--
GOOD LORD! LOOK OUT, HANSON! LOOK OUT!

THE SKIPPER'S WARNING IS FUTILE AND THE ASTRAGLIA SHUDDERS AS SHE BEGINS TO BREAK APART UNDER A FURIOUS ASSAULT...



...BUT ONLY THE EARS OF THE DYING SEAMEN HEAR THE ROARING CRY THAT ECHOES ABOVE THE SOUND OF THE SHATTERED TANKER.



NEXT ISSUE: **THE PAST IS A BUCKET OF ASHES!** STICK AROUND, FOLKS! THINGS ARE ABOUT TO GET WORSE AGAIN!

MARVEL
the mighty
THOR
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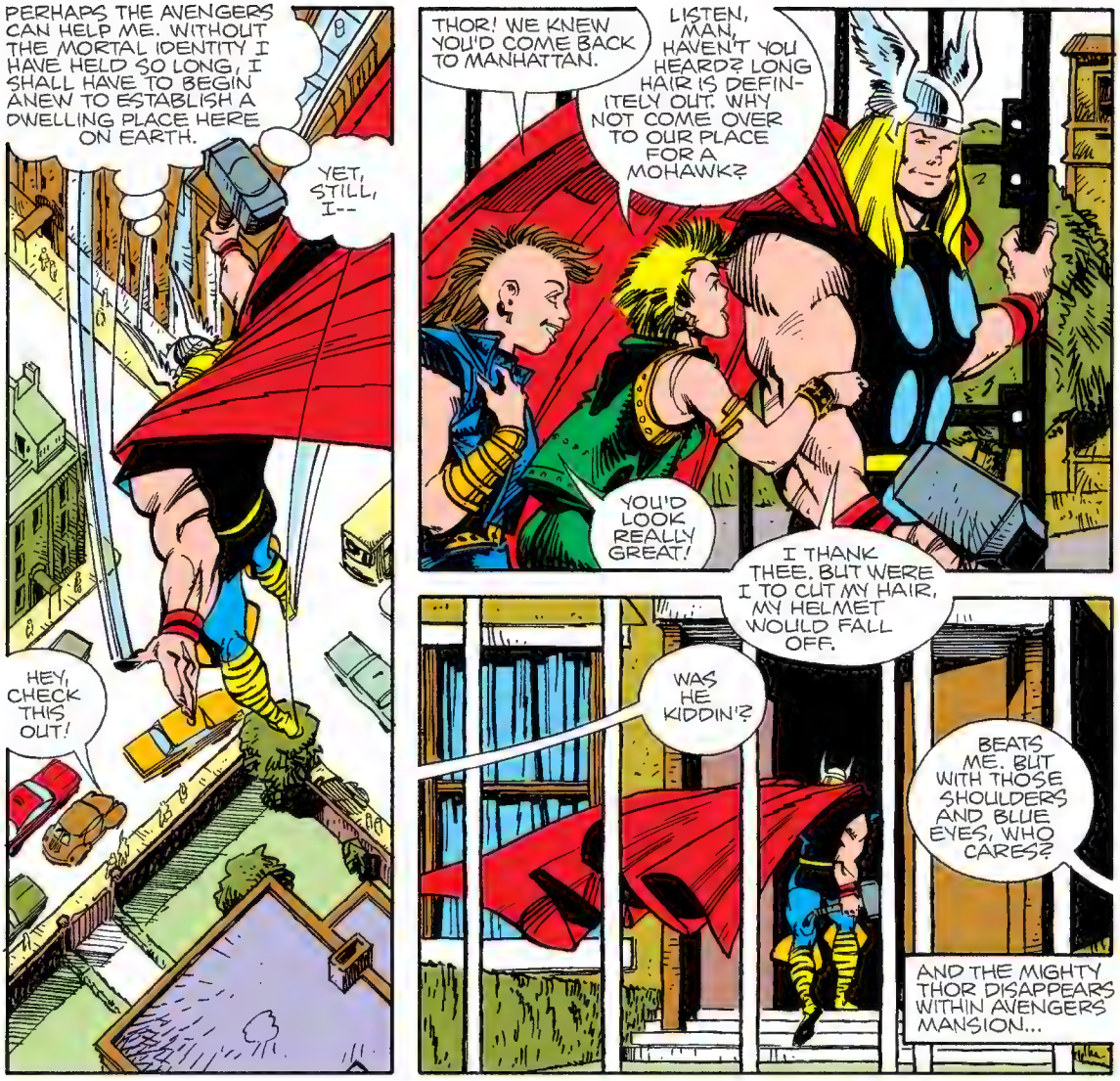
STAN LEE PRESENTS: the MIGHTY THOR®

THE PAST IS A BUCKET OF ASHES

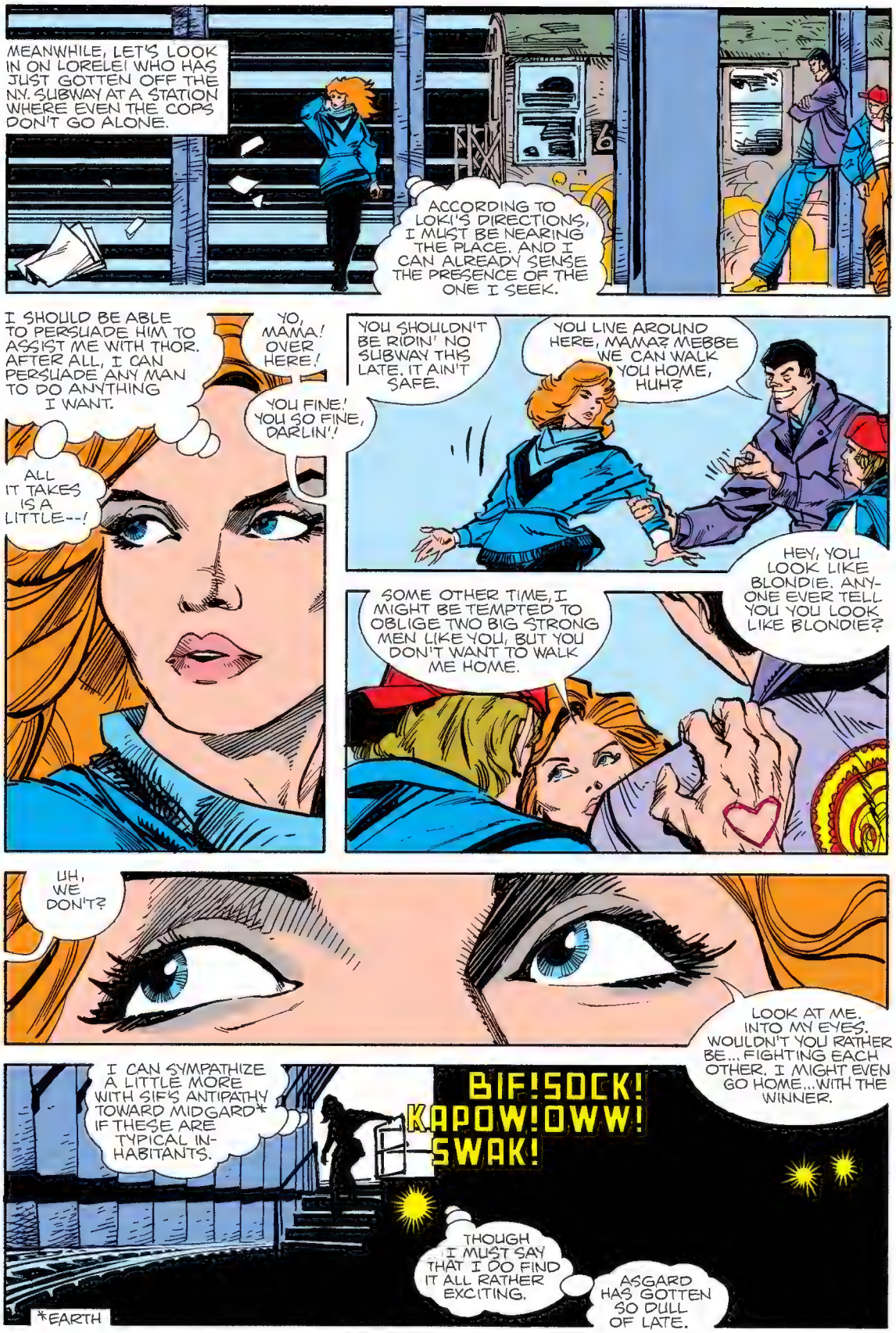
NEW YORK CITY, ON A CRISP, BLUE MORNING, WATCHES AS A POWERFUL FIGURE, LONG ABSENT FROM THE BUSY METROPOLIS, SOARS OVERHEAD...
AH, NOW MY HEART SINGS. THOUGH IT HAS BEEN MONTHS SINCE I LAST SAW HER, STILL THE GREAT CITY BUSTLES WITH THE FURIOUS ENERGY OF YOUTH. STILL I FEEL AT HOME HERE AS NOWHERE ELSE.
YET NOW THAT I AM NO LONGER THE MORTAL PHYSICIAN, DONALD BLAKE, I HAVE NO HOME IN ALL OF EARTH'S MANY REALMS.*
AND EVEN THE GOD OF THUNDER NEEDS A PLACE TO HANG HIS HAMMER ON A COLD WINTRY NIGHT.
BEEP! HONK! HONK!
HONK!
Beeeep!
QUICK, MILDRED! MY CAMERA! IT'S THE MIGHTY THOR!
OH, RONALD! I CAN'T BELIEVE IT. HE'S SO HANDSOME! OHHHHHH!
MILDRED? MILDRED?!
*LAST ISSUE'S CLASSIC TALE. IF YOU MISSED IT, FOR SHAME!

ART AND STORY: WALTER SIMONSON · LETTERING: JOHN WORKMAN, JR. · COLORS: GEORGE ROUSSOS · EDITING: MARK GRUENWALD · EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: JIM SHOOTER


PERHAPS THE AVENGERS CAN HELP ME. WITHOUT THE MORTAL IDENTITY I HAVE HELD SO LONG, I SHALL HAVE TO BEGIN ANEW TO ESTABLISH A DWELLING PLACE HERE ON EARTH.
YET, STILL, I--
HEY, CHECK THIS OUT!
THOR! WE KNEW YOU'D COME BACK TO MANHATTAN.
LISTEN, MAN, HAVEN'T YOU HEARD? LONG HAIR IS DEFINITELY OUT. WHY NOT COME OVER TO OUR PLACE FOR A MOHAWK?
YOU'D LOOK REALLY GREAT!
I THANK THEE. BUT WERE I TO CUT MY HAIR, MY HELMET WOULD FALL OFF.
WAS HE KIDDIN'?
BEATS ME. BUT WITH THOSE SHOULDERS AND BLUE EYES, WHO CARES?
AND THE MIGHTY THOR DISAPPEARS WITHIN AVENGERS MANSION...

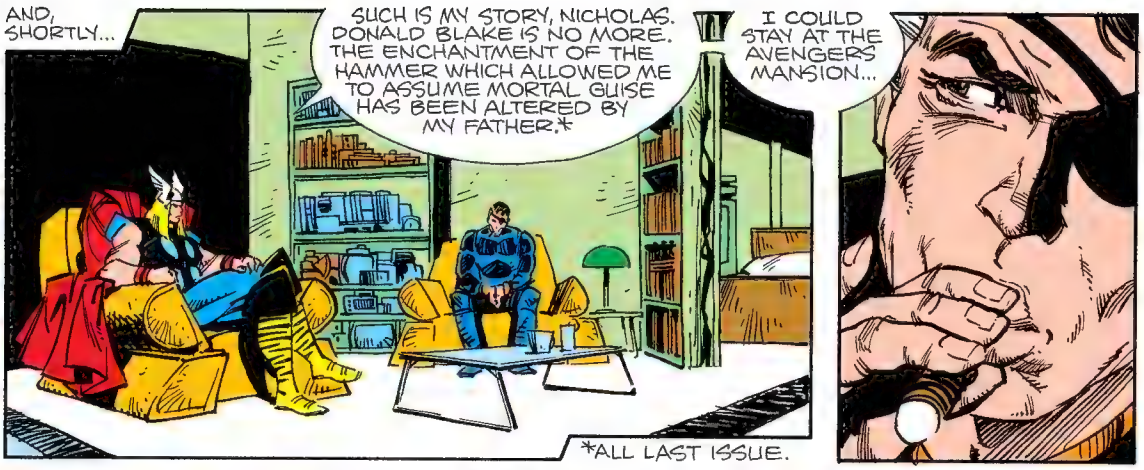
...TO FIND HIMSELF ON THE MOST SURPRISING ADVENTURE OF HIS CAREER.*

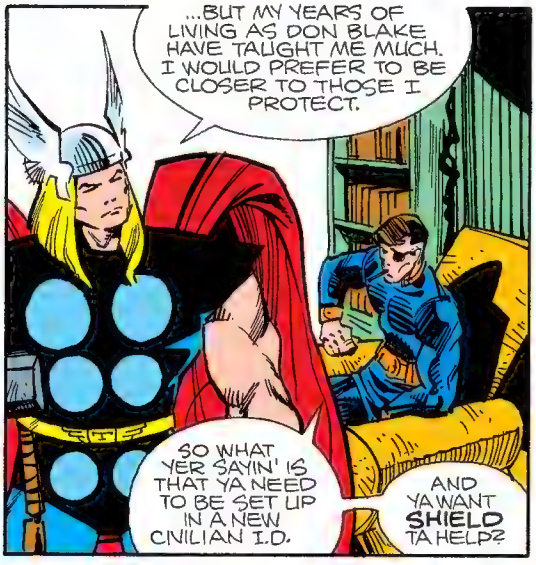
*SO SURPRISING, IN FACT, THAT WE CAN'T EVEN TELL YOU ABOUT IT UNTIL NEXT MONTH! WATCH THIS SPACE.

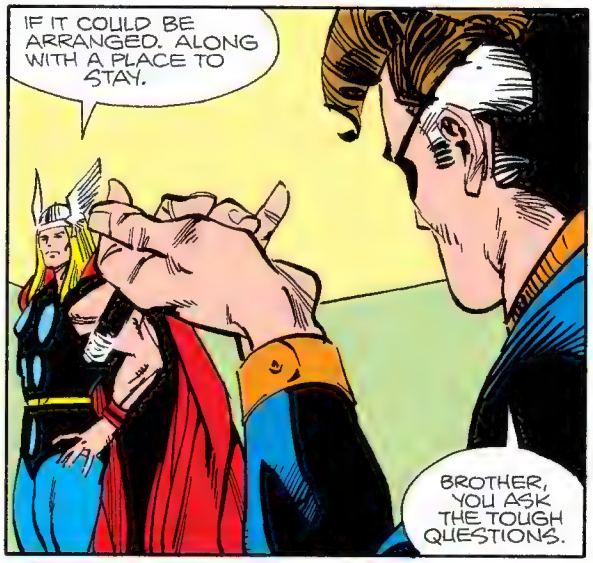

MEANWHILE, LET'S LOOK IN ON LORELEI WHO HAS JUST GOTTEN OFF THE N.Y. SUBWAY AT A STATION WHERE EVEN THE COPS DON'T GO ALONE.
ACCORDING TO LOKI'S DIRECTIONS, I MUST BE NEARING THE PLACE. AND I CAN ALREADY SENSE THE PRESENCE OF THE ONE I SEEK.
I SHOULD BE ABLE TO PERSUADE HIM TO ASSIST ME WITH THOR. AFTER ALL, I CAN PERSUADE ANY MAN TO DO ANYTHING I WANT.
YO, MAMA! OVER HERE!
YOU FINE! YOU SO FINE, DARLIN'!
ALL IT TAKES IS A LITTLE--!
YOU SHOULDN'T BE RIDIN' NO SUBWAY THIS LATE. IT AIN'T SAFE.
YOU LIVE AROUND HERE, MAMA? MEBBE WE CAN WALK YOU HOME, HUH?
HEY, YOU LOOK LIKE BLONDIE. ANY-ONE EVER TELL YOU YOU LOOK LIKE BLONDIE?
SOME OTHER TIME, I MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO OBLIGE TWO BIG STRONG MEN LIKE YOU, BUT YOU DON'T WANT TO WALK ME HOME.
UH, WE DON'T?
LOOK AT ME. INTO MY EYES. WOULDN'T YOU RATHER BE... FIGHTING EACH OTHER. I MIGHT EVEN GO HOME...WITH THE WINNER.
I CAN SYMPATHIZE A LITTLE MORE WITH SIF'S ANTIPATHY TOWARD MIDGARD* IF THESE ARE TYPICAL IN-HABITANTS.
BIF! SOCK! KAPOW! OWW! SWAK!
THOUGH I MUST SAY THAT I DO FIND IT ALL RATHER EXCITING.
ASGARD HAS GOTTEN SO DULL OF LATE.
*EARTH

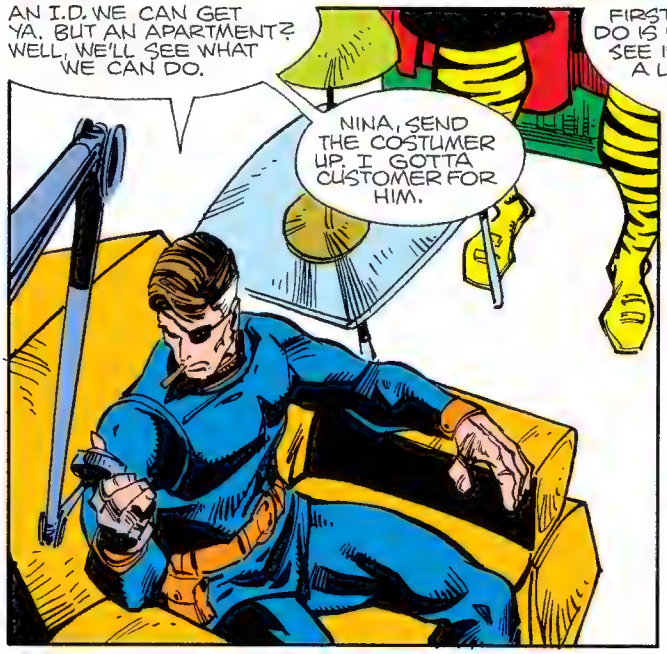
AFTER WALKING DOWN THE DARKENED SUBWAY TUNNEL A FEW HUNDRED YARDS...
AH, HERE IS THE PASSAGE LOKI SPOKE OF...
... AND HERE THE ABANDONED STATION WHEREIN THE ONE I SEEK IS CONCEALED, LITTLE DREAMING OF THE DESTINY THAT AWAITS HIM.
FOR WITH HIS HELP, I SHALL SNARE THE MIGHTY THOR AS SIF NEVER DID AND HE SHALL BE MINE FOREVER!
GRROWLLLLL! WHO DISTURBS MY REST? WHO HAS DARED TO ENTER THE LAIR... OF THE DRAGON?
LOOK BEFORE YOU, OH, MIGHTY ONE AND TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE.
A BOLD BEAUTY, INDEED. BUT I CAN SMELL THE ASGARDIAN IN YOU. AND THOSE OF ASGARD ARE MY MORTAL ENEMIES!
THOSE OF ASGARD ARE YOUR MASTERS, DRAGON. I HAVE COME FOR YOUR AID AND YOU SHALL GIVE IT TO ME, WHETHER YOU WILL OR NO.
FOR WITH YOUR HELP, THE MIGHTY THOR SHALL BE MINE!
THOR! THE SON OF ACCURSED ODIN! WHAT KNOW YOU OF THOR?!
GAZE UPON ME. LOOK INTO MY EYES AND I WILL TELL YOU.
INDEED YOU SHALL, LITTLE MISTRESS.
FOR THE POWER OF THE DRAGON IS NOT ONLY THAT OF FLAME AND FURY, BUT OF PERSUASION.
I WILL LOOK DEEP INTO YOUR EYES...
OH!
...AND YOU WILL TELL ME
I... WILL...
EVERY-THING.
...TELL...

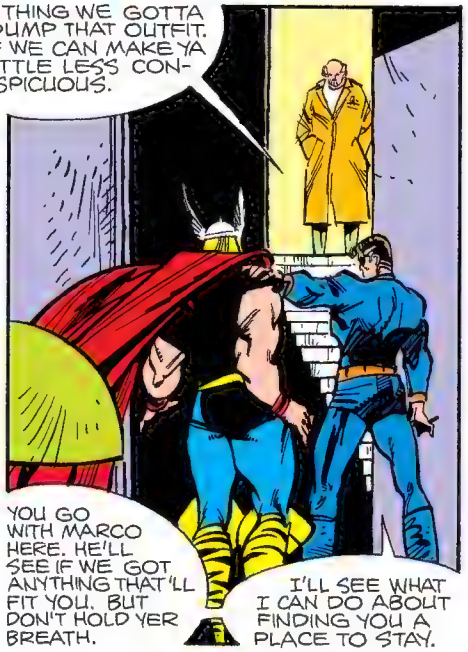
A COUPLE OF WEEKS LATER, AS COL. NICK FURY, DIRECTOR OF SHIELD, IS REVIEWING THE LATEST REPORTS AT HQ...
GOT A VISITOR, NICK. AND I DON'T BELIEVE IT.
I THOUGHT MAYBE HE WUZ GONE FOR GOOD.
NOT A CHANCE. YOU JUST CAN'T STOP A JOE LIKE HIM.
HI, THOR. NICE OF YOU TO DROP IN. GLAD TO SEE YA MADE IT BACK IN ONE PIECE.
THIS A SOCIAL CALL?
I NEED AID, COLONEL. I THOUGHT PERHAPS SHIELD MIGHT BEST BE EQUIPPED TO ASSIST ME. IT'S--
STRANGE. FOR A MOMENT, I FELT AS THOUGH I HEARD SOMEONE CALL MY NAME, AS I HAVE NOT HEARD IT CALLED IN A THOUSAND YEARS.
THOR? YOU ALL RIGHT, FELLA?
FINE, NICHOLAS. I'M FINE. MAY WE TALK SOMEWHERE, PRIVATELY?
SURE. RANK HATH ITS PRIVILEGES.
NOT ONLY DO I GET TO RAMROD THE JOINT, I GET A PRIVATE SUITE. COURTESY OF THE TAXPAYERS.
AFTER YOU.


AND, SHORTLY...
SUCH IS MY STORY, NICHOLAS. DONALD BLAKE IS NO MORE. THE ENCHANTMENT OF THE HAMMER WHICH ALLOWED ME TO ASSUME MORTAL GUISE HAS BEEN ALTERED BY MY FATHER.*
I COULD STAY AT THE AVENGERS MANSION...
*ALL LAST ISSUE.

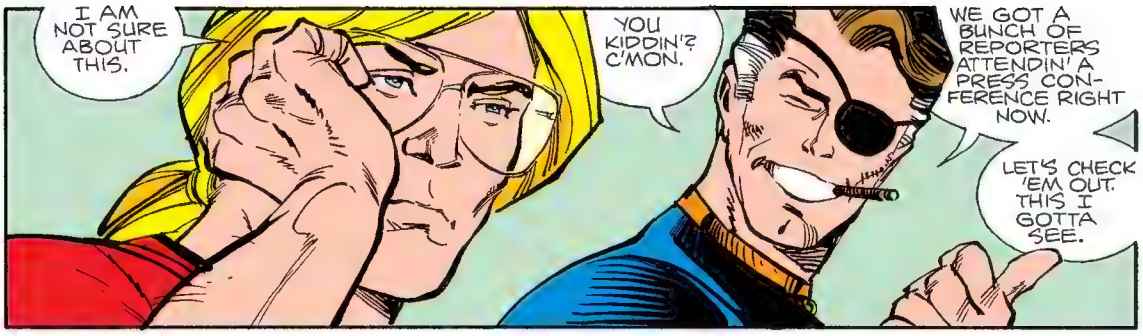

...BUT MY YEARS OF LIVING AS DON BLAKE HAVE TAUGHT ME MUCH. I WOULD PREFER TO BE CLOSER TO THOSE I PROTECT.
SO WHAT YER SAYIN' IS THAT YA NEED TO BE SET UP IN A NEW CIVILIAN I.D.
AND YA WANT SHIELD TA HELP?

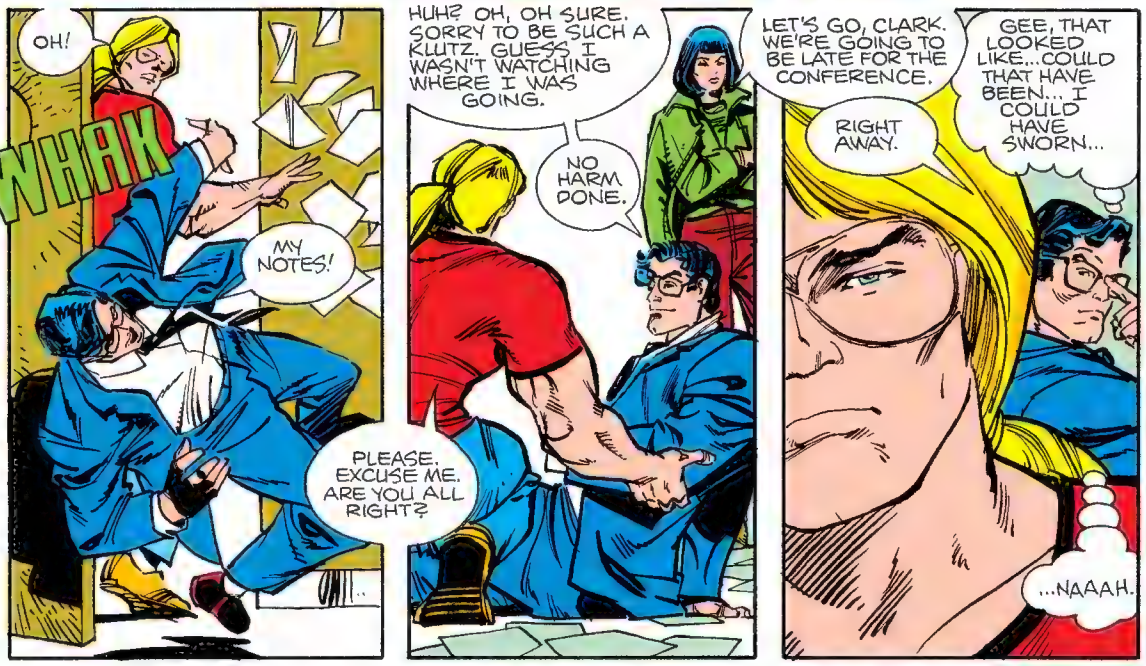

IF IT COULD BE ARRANGED. ALONG WITH A PLACE TO STAY.
BROTHER, YOU ASK THE TOUGH QUESTIONS.


AN I.D. WE CAN GET YA. BUT AN APARTMENT? WELL, WE'LL SEE WHAT WE CAN DO.
NINA, SEND THE COSTUMER UP. I GOTTA CUSTOMER FOR HIM.

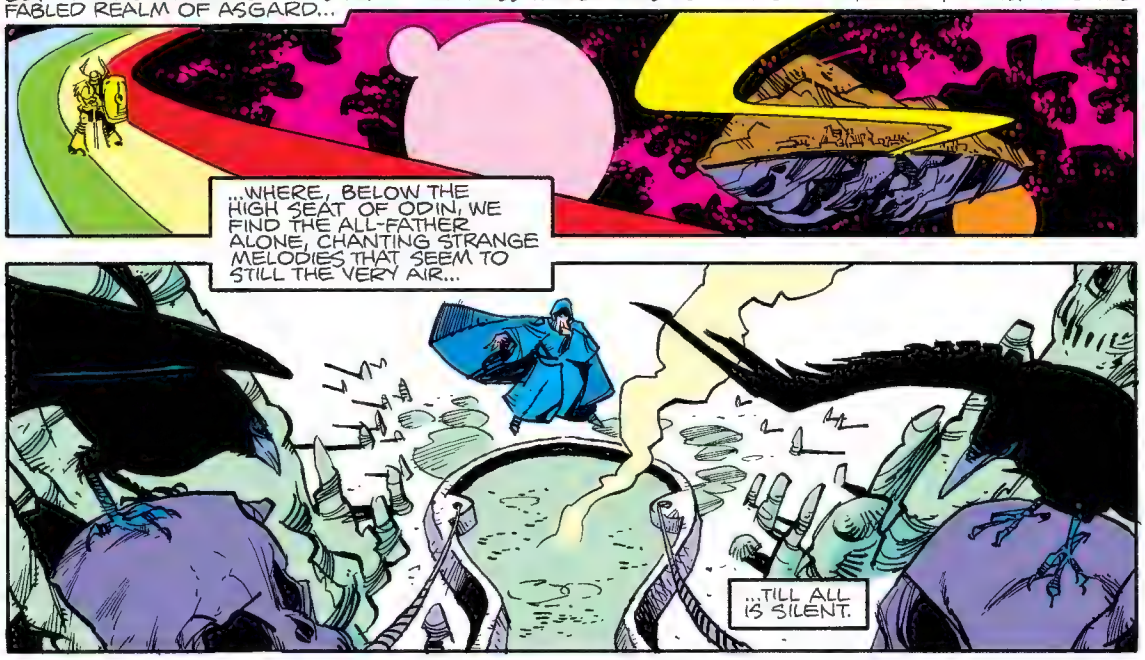

FIRST THING WE GOTTA DO IS DUMP THAT OUTFIT. SEE IF WE CAN MAKE YA A LITTLE LESS CONSPICUOUS.
YOU GO WITH MARCO HERE. HE'LL SEE IF WE GOT ANYTHING THAT'LL FIT YOU. BUT DON'T HOLD YER BREATH.
I'LL SEE WHAT I CAN DO ABOUT FINDING YOU A PLACE TO STAY.

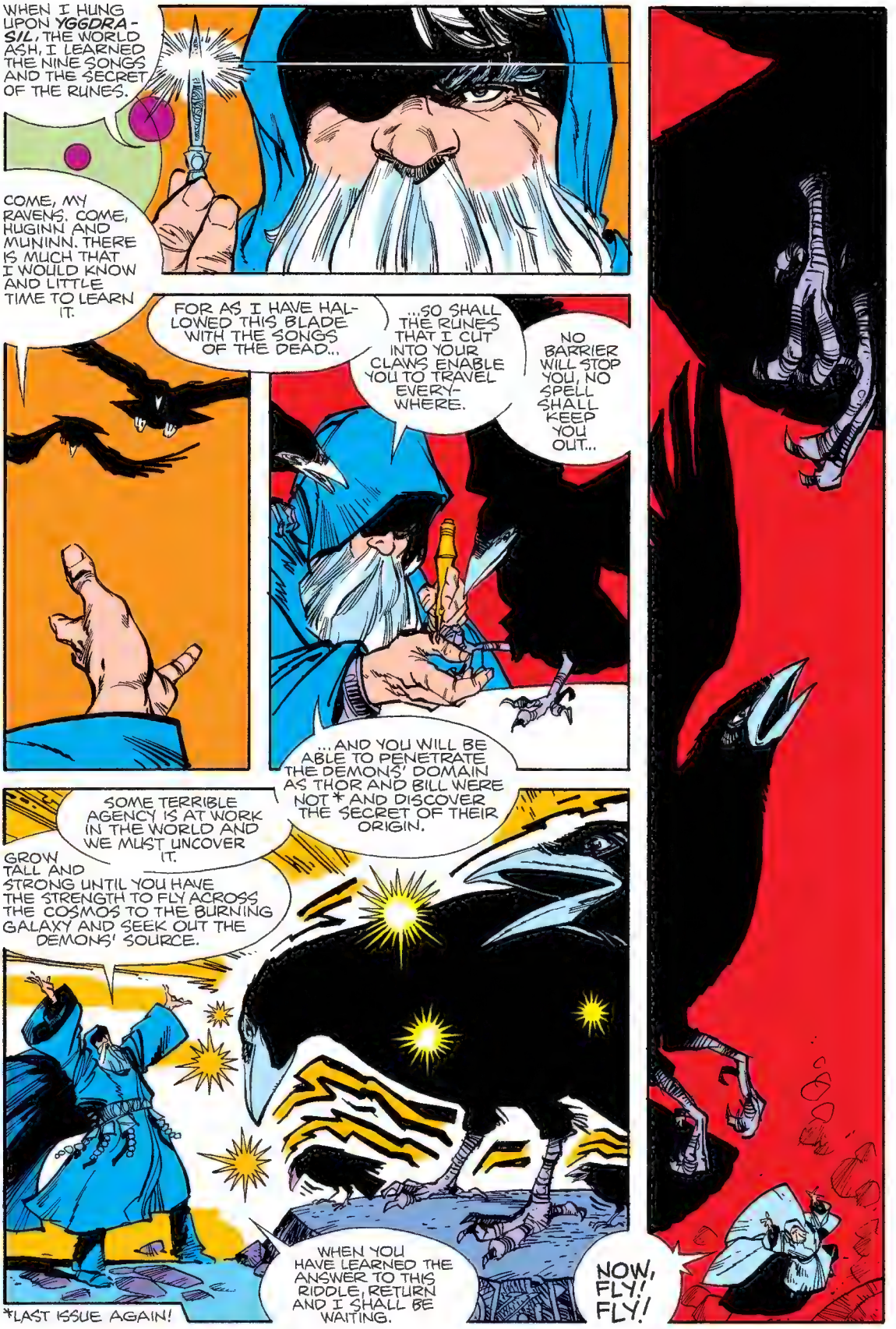
A HALF HOUR LATER...
KNOCK
KNOCK
COME IN.
HOLY COW!
IS ANYTHING WRONG?
NAW, YOU LOOK GREAT.
I GOT AN APARTMENT FOR YA, BUT YA HAVETA SETTLE FER BROOKLYN. EVEN SHIELD CAN'T FIND NOTHIN' IN MANHATTAN.
IT'S YOU I'M WORRIED ABOUT. YOU MAY BE IN CIVVIES, BUT EVERYBODY'S STILL GONNA RECOGNIZE YA.
I KNEW THOSE SHOULDERS WERE GONNA BE TROUBLE.
HEY! HOLD THE PHONE A SEC. I JUST GOT THE GREATEST IDEA SINCE PIZZA.
WHERE'D I DUMP THOSE THINGS? AH, GOT 'EM!
HERE! PUT THESE CHEATERS ON! THEY ALWAYS WORKED FOR THAT OTHER GUY!

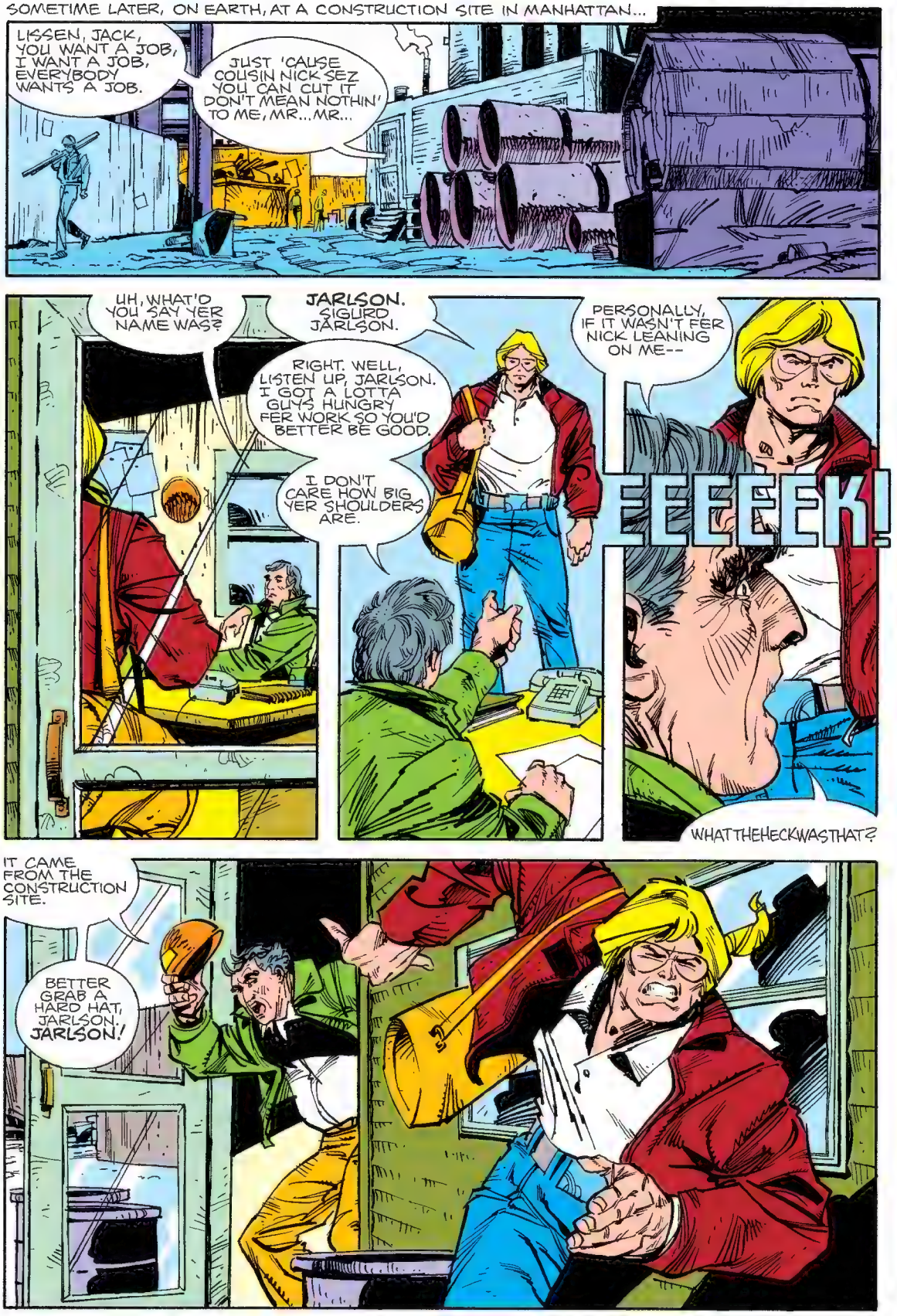

I AM NOT SURE ABOUT THIS.
YOU KIDDIN'? C'MON.
WE GOT A BUNCH OF REPORTERS ATTENDIN' A PRESS CONFERENCE RIGHT NOW.
LET'S CHECK 'EM OUT. THIS I GOTTA SEE.

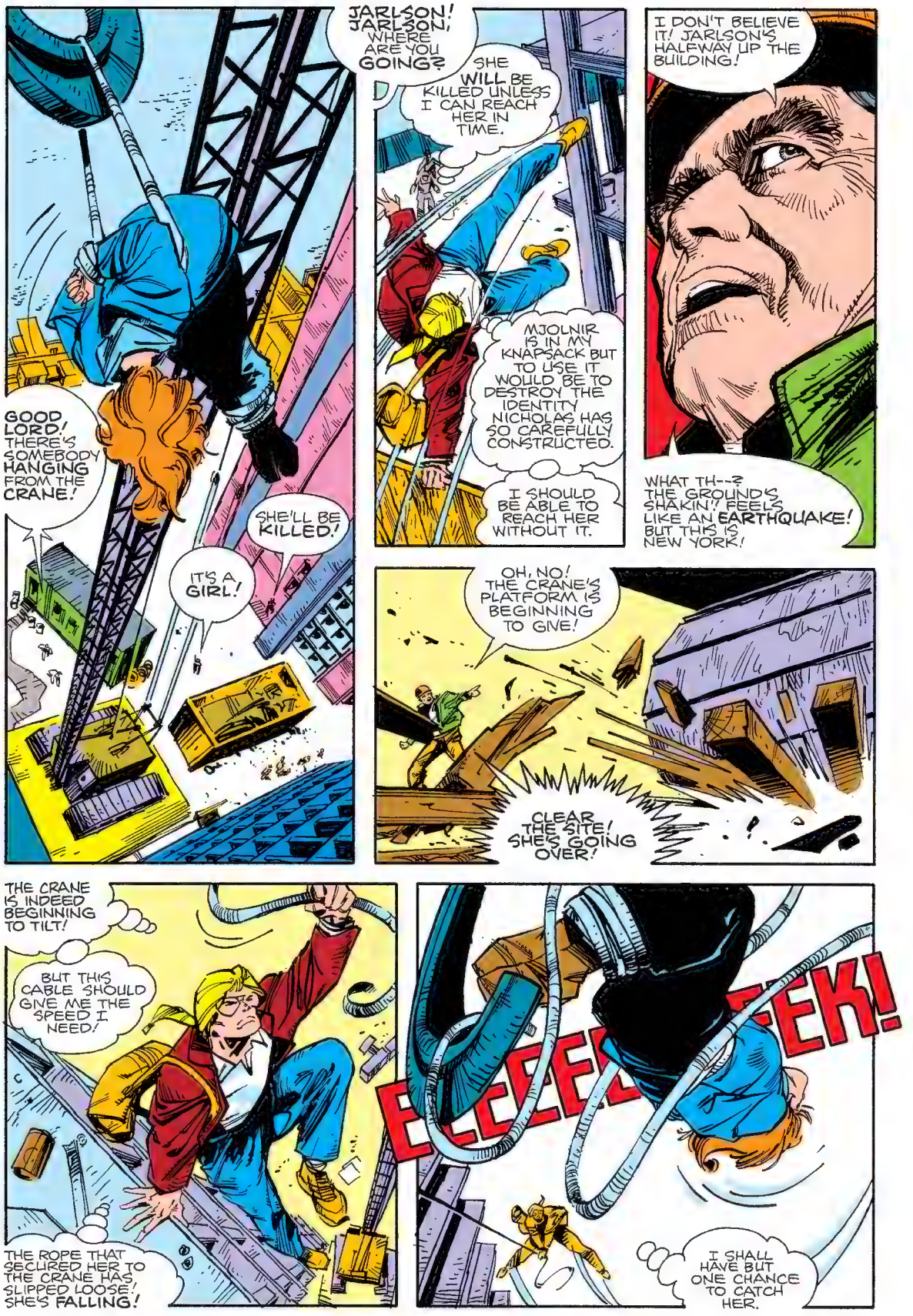

OH!
WHAK
MY NOTES!
PLEASE. EXCUSE ME. ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
HUH? OH, OH SURE. SORRY TO BE SUCH A KLUTZ. GUESS I WASN'T WATCHING WHERE I WAS GOING.
NO HARM DONE.
LET'S GO, CLARK. WE'RE GOING TO BE LATE FOR THE CONFERENCE.
RIGHT AWAY.
GEE, THAT LOOKED LIKE...COULD THAT HAVE BEEN... I COULD HAVE SWORN...
...NAAAH.

BUT EVEN AS THE REPORTERS LEAVE AND MISS THE BIGGEST STORY OF THE MONTH, WE TURN TO THE FABLED REALM OF ASGARD...


...WHERE, BELOW THE HIGH SEAT OF ODIN, WE FIND THE ALL-FATHER ALONE, CHANTING STRANGE MELODIES THAT SEEM TO STILL THE VERY AIR...
...TILL ALL IS SILENT.


WHEN I HUNG UPON YGGDRASIL, THE WORLD ASH, I LEARNED THE NINE SONGS AND THE SECRET OF THE RUNES.
COME, MY RAVENS. COME, HUGINN AND MUNINN. THERE IS MUCH THAT I WOULD KNOW AND LITTLE TIME TO LEARN IT.
FOR AS I HAVE HALLOWED THIS BLADE WITH THE SONGS OF THE DEAD...
...SO SHALL THE RUNES THAT I CUT INTO YOUR CLAWS ENABLE YOU TO TRAVEL EVERYWHERE.
NO BARRIER WILL STOP YOU, NO SPELL SHALL KEEP YOU OUT...
...AND YOU WILL BE ABLE TO PENETRATE THE DEMONS' DOMAIN AS THOR AND BILL WERE NOT* AND DISCOVER THE SECRET OF THEIR ORIGIN.
SOME TERRIBLE AGENCY IS AT WORK IN THE WORLD AND WE MUST UNCOVER IT.
GROW TALL AND STRONG UNTIL YOU HAVE THE STRENGTH TO FLY ACROSS THE COSMOS TO THE BURNING GALAXY AND SEEK OUT THE DEMONS' SOURCE.
WHEN YOU HAVE LEARNED THE ANSWER TO THIS RIDDLE, RETURN AND I SHALL BE WAITING.
NOW, FLY! FLY!
*LAST ISSUE AGAIN!


SOMETIME LATER, ON EARTH, AT A CONSTRUCTION SITE IN MANHATTAN...
LISSEN, JACK, YOU WANT A JOB, I WANT A JOB, EVERYBODY WANTS A JOB.
JUST 'CAUSE COUSIN NICK SEZ YOU CAN CUT IT DON'T MEAN NOTHIN' TO ME, MR... MR...
UH, WHAT'D YOU SAY YER NAME WAS?
JARLSON. SIGURD JARLSON.
RIGHT. WELL, LISTEN UP, JARLSON. I GOT A LOTTA GUYS HUNGRY FER WORK SO YOU'D BETTER BE GOOD.
I DON'T CARE HOW BIG YER SHOULDERS ARE.
PERSONALLY, IF IT WASN'T FER NICK LEANING ON ME--
EEEEEK!
WHATTHEHECKWASTHAT?
IT CAME FROM THE CONSTRUCTION SITE.
BETTER GRAB A HARD HAT, JARLSON. JARLSON!


GOOD LORD! THERE'S SOMEBODY HANGING FROM THE CRANE!
IT'S A GIRL!
SHE'LL BE KILLED!
JARLSON! JARLSON, WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
SHE WILL BE KILLED UNLESS I CAN REACH HER IN TIME.
MJOLNIR IS IN MY KNAPSACK BUT TO USE IT WOULD BE TO DESTROY THE IDENTITY NICHOLAS HAS SO CAREFULLY CONSTRUCTED.
I SHOULD BE ABLE TO REACH HER WITHOUT IT.
I DON'T BELIEVE IT! JARLSON'S HALFWAY UP THE BUILDING!
WHAT TH--? THE GROUND'S SHAKIN'! FEELS LIKE AN EARTHQUAKE! BUT THIS IS NEW YORK!
OH, NO! THE CRANE'S PLATFORM IS BEGINNING TO GIVE!
CLEAR THE SITE! SHE'S GOING OVER!
THE CRANE IS INDEED BEGINNING TO TILT!
BUT THIS CABLE SHOULD GIVE ME THE SPEED I NEED!
THE ROPE THAT SECURED HER TO THE CRANE HAS SLIPPED LOOSE! SHE'S FALLING!
EEEEEEEEEK!
I SHALL HAVE BUT ONE CHANCE TO CATCH HER.

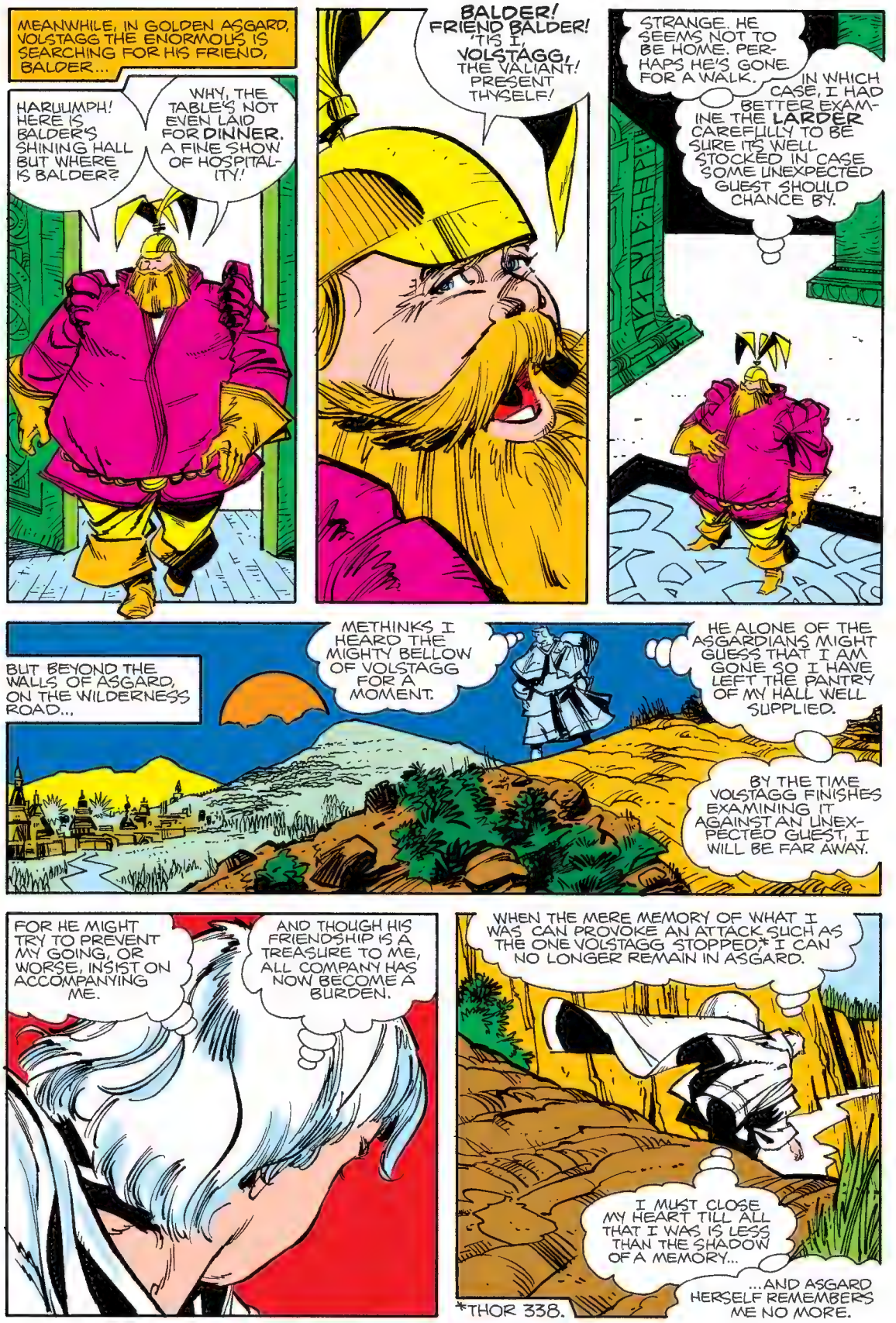
JUST IN TIME! ANOTHER MOMENT AND IT WOULD HAVE BEEN TOO LATE.
THE LADY SEEMS TO HAVE FAINTED FROM THE SHOCK.
YET HOW CAME SHE TO DANGLE ABOVE THE CITY SO?
THOUGH SHE IS SAFE FOR THE MOMENT, THERE IS MORE HERE THAN MEETS THE EYE.
AGAIN THE GROUND SHAKES! BUT 'TIS NO EARTHQUAKE!
AY?
AT LAST I HAVE FOUND THEE!
AND I WILL BE THY DEATH!
NAY, IT CANNOT BE! WHAT VISION OF EVIL IS THIS RISING OUT OF THE RIVER?
BEFORE ME STANDS THE LIKENESS OF ONE I DEFEATED AGES AGO, LARGER AND SEEMINGLY MORE DEADLY THAN EVER!
THOUGH THY GARB IS FOREIGN, YET DO I RECOGNIZE MY GREATEST ENEMY.
THE WENCH HAS SERVED ME WELL! THE TRAP IS SPRUNG!
REMEMBER, SON OF ODIN, THAT NOTHING COULD DEFEAT FAFNIR OF NASTROND FOREVER!
SHLATTTER!
AND CARRY THAT THOUGHT TO YOUR GRAVE!
THE VERY BUILDING COLLAPSES AROUND US.
MY HAMMER! I MUST REACH MY HAMMER!

ELSEWHERE, BEYOND THE FIELDS WE KNOW, A HOST PAST COUNTING LISTENS TO A VOICE AS OLD AS TIME SPEAK...
"FROM THE STARLESS VOID...
"FROM THE REALMS OF ENDLESS NIGHT...
"BY THE POWER OF THE UNFINISHED SWORD BEFORE ME...
"I SUMMON--THE DARK ELF!
"HEED MY CALL! SEEK OUT THE SECOND SON OF ODIN!"
DOOM!
AND IN THE LIGHTLESS DEPTHS OF SPACE, A VOICE ANSWERS...
"I WILL."

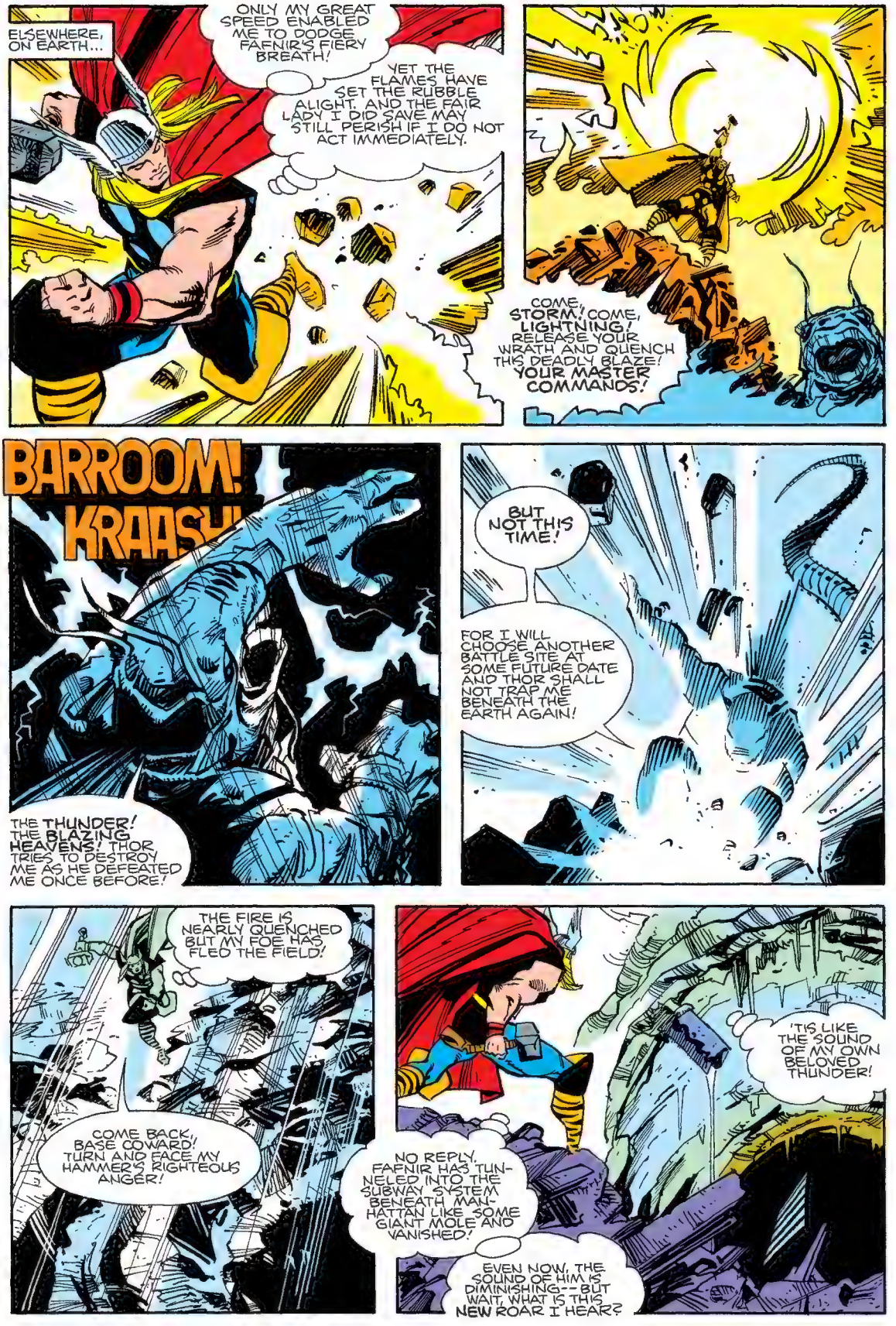
MEANWHILE, ON EARTH...
ONLY A WHIRLING VORTEX CREATED BY MY ENCHANTED MALLET CAN SAVE US NOW.
IT WILL PREVENT THE DEBRIS FROM CRUSHING US AS WE LIGHT UPON THE GROUND.
AND WHILE THE RUBBLE SETTLES ABOVE US, I CAN FORM A CAVITY HERE TO HOLD HER SAFELY TILL I DEAL WITH FAFNIR.
BUT WAIT, AGAIN I HEAR MY NAME, AS THOUGH SOMEONE WERE CALLING TO ME FROM A GREAT DISTANCE.
CALLING IN THE TONGUE OF THE NORSEMEN...
...YET SO SOFTLY THAT IT FADES AWAY TO NOTHING.
THIS RIDDLE CAN WAIT. NOW, FAFNIR THE DRAGON, WHOM I ONCE FOUGHT IN BATTLE* HAS RETURNED.
HE HAS TRIED TO DESTROY BOTH THIS INNOCENT AND MYSELF...
...AND HE SHALL HAVE CAUSE TO REGRET THAT.
'TIS WELL THAT I AM NO LONGER DONALD BLAKE, FOR HE WOULD NOT HAVE SURVIVED THAT FALL.
STILL, SOME LITTLE ENCHANTMENT IS LEFT WITHIN MJOLNIR, AND WHEN I STRIKE THE HAMMER UPON THE GROUND, IT WILL COME TO MY AID.
*NO POINTS OR PRIZES IF YOU CAN REMEMBER BACK THAT FAR, BUT WE'LL BE IMPRESSED.
SO DIES THE MIGHTY THOR, A VICTIM OF AN EVEN MIGHTIER--
KRACKE!
WHAT WAS THAT?
SURELY NOT EVEN THOR COULD HAVE SURVIVED THAT FALL, BUT I SHALL NOT UNDERESTIMATE HIM.
I SHALL FIND HIS BODY AND BURN IT TO A CINDER!
THEN WILL ODIN KNOW AND FEAR ME.

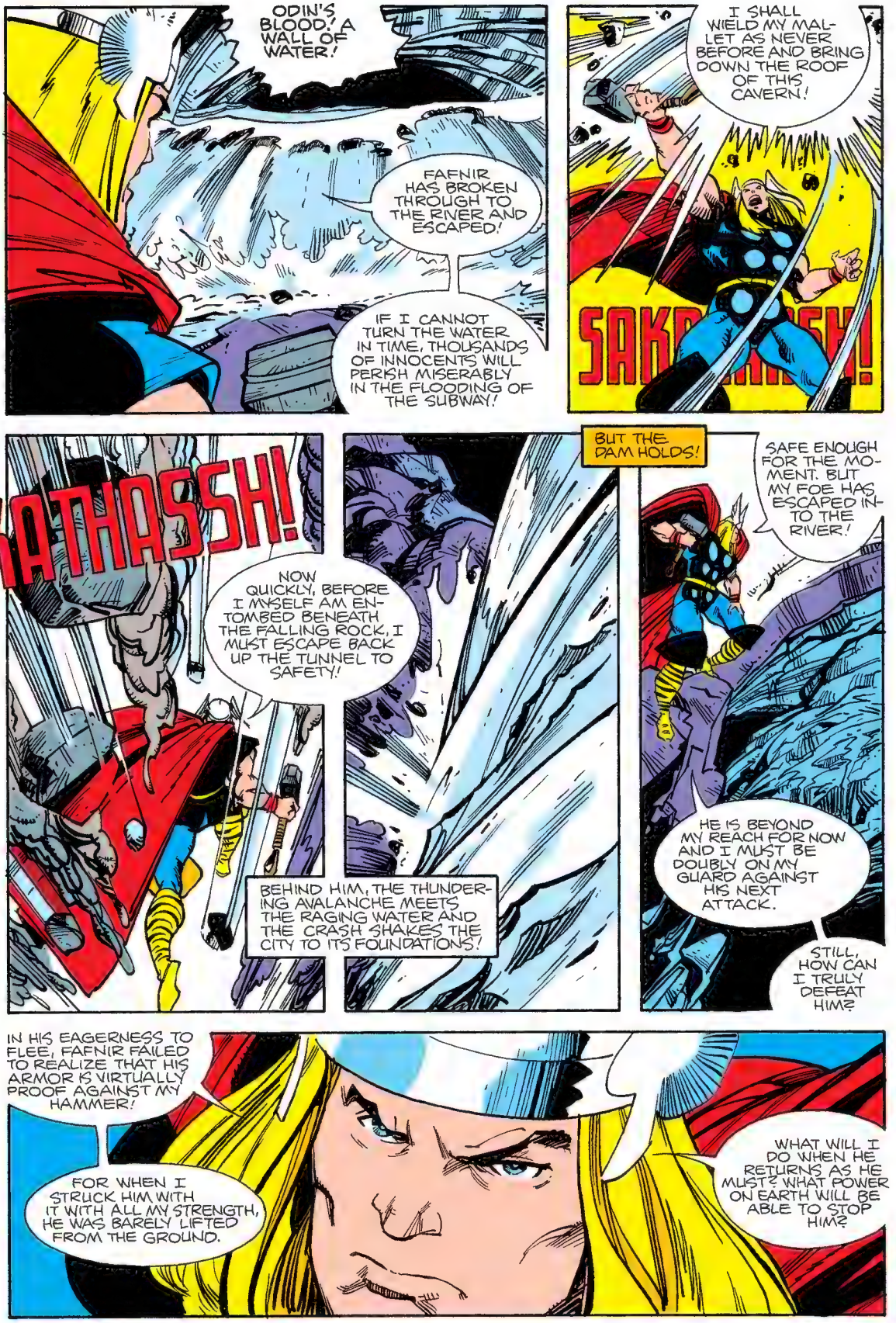
SCION OF EVIL! MY FATHER FEARS NO GOD OR DRAGON, WHATEVER HIS POWER!
UGGH!
KA-ROOOOM!
NOW SPEAK BEFORE I UNLEASH MY FURY! HOW CAME YOU HERE AND WHAT DO YOU SEEK?
TALK NOT TO ME OF FURY, SON OF AN ACCURSED LINE! THE WRATH OF GODS COUNTS FOR NOTHING BESIDE THE TERRIBLE ANGER OF THE DRAGON!
AND YET I THANK BOTH YOU AND YOUR FATHER.
WHERE I WAS ONCE A MORTAL KING WHO DALLIED WITH PALTRY EVILS, NOW, BECAUSE OF ODIN, I AM AN INVINCIBLE CREATURE OF HATE!
FOR ODIN HIMSELF DESTROYED MY PEOPLE AND FORCED ME INTO THE WEARISOME EXILE...
...WHEREIN I DISCOVERED THE SECRET OF MY TRANSFORMATION!

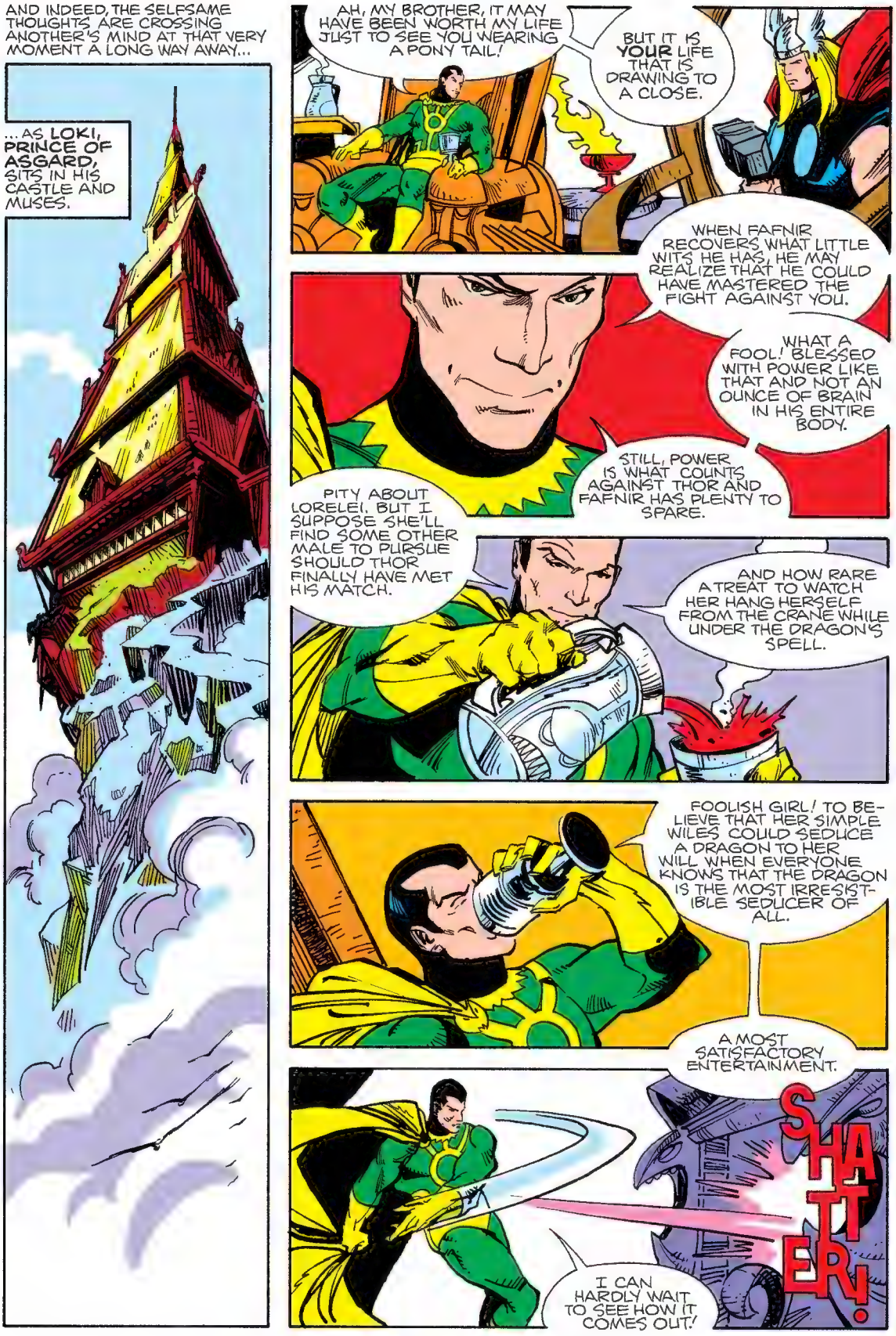
I WISH TO REPAY ODIN'S GENEROSITY WITH THE DEATH OF HIS SON!
AND I SHALL!
EVIL YOU WERE, KING FAFNIR, AND EVIL YOU ARE STILL.
WELL DO I REMEMBER THE LAST TIME WE MET, THOUGH IT WAS AGES GONE BY.
"HOW YOU NURSED YOUR HATE AND VENGEANCE IN THE BLASTED LAND OF NASTROND, YOUR FORMER KINGDOM!
"HOW YOU TRIED TO SLAY ME AND MY COMPANIONS WHEN WE JOURNEYED THERE AT NOBLE ODIN'S REQUEST...
"...AND HOW WITH THUNDER AND LIGHTNING I SPLIT THE VERY EARTH ASUNDER SO THAT YOU WERE SWALLOWED UP AND VANQUISHED."
TRUE! ALL TRUE! I WAS TRAPPED BENEATH THE EARTH FOR EONS, GROWING AND HATING...
...UNTIL RECENTLY THE GROUND SHOOK AGAIN AND BROKE, RELEASING ME FROM MY PRISON!
AND NOW, I SHALL HAVE MY LONG DELAYED VENGEANCE!
FAROOOOSH!!

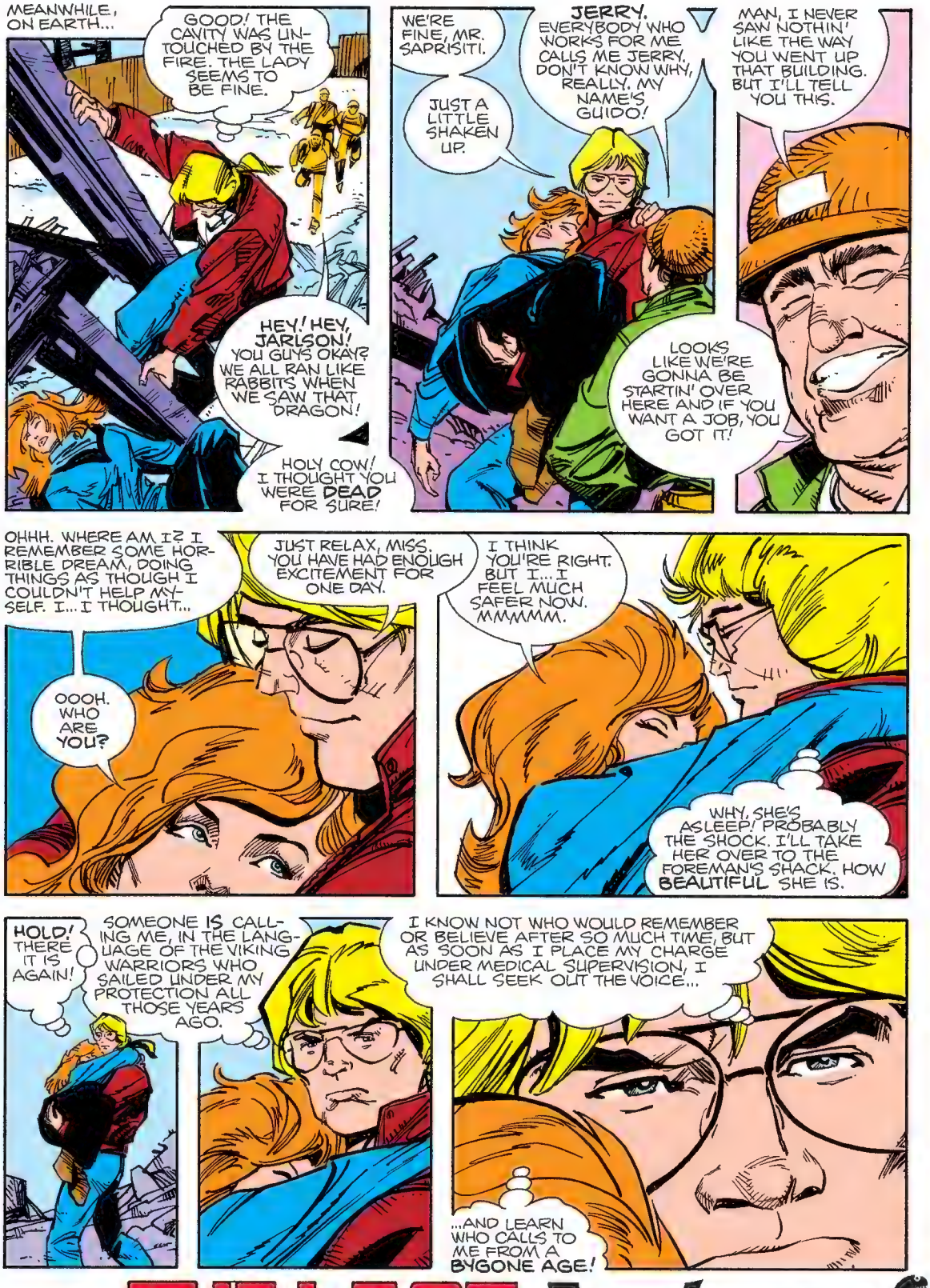

MEANWHILE, IN GOLDEN ASGARD, VOLSTAGG THE ENORMOUS IS SEARCHING FOR HIS FRIEND, BALDER...
HARUUMPH! HERE IS BALDER'S SHINING HALL BUT WHERE IS BALDER?
WHY, THE TABLE'S NOT EVEN LAID FOR DINNER. A FINE SHOW OF HOSPITALITY!
BALDER! FRIEND BALDER! 'TIS I, VOLSTAGG, THE VALIANT! PRESENT THYSELF!
STRANGE. HE SEEMS NOT TO BE HOME. PERHAPS HE'S GONE FOR A WALK.
IN WHICH CASE, I HAD BETTER EXAMINE THE LARDER CAREFULLY TO BE SURE IT'S WELL STOCKED IN CASE SOME UNEXPECTED GUEST SHOULD CHANCE BY.
BUT BEYOND THE WALLS OF ASGARD, ON THE WILDERNESS ROAD...
METHINKS I HEARD THE MIGHTY BELLOW OF VOLSTAGG FOR A MOMENT.
HE ALONE OF THE ASGARDIANS MIGHT GUESS THAT I AM GONE SO I HAVE LEFT THE PANTRY OF MY HALL WELL SUPPLIED.
BY THE TIME VOLSTAGG FINISHES EXAMINING IT AGAINST AN UNEXPECTED GUEST, I WILL BE FAR AWAY.
FOR HE MIGHT TRY TO PREVENT MY GOING, OR WORSE, INSIST ON ACCOMPANYING ME.
AND THOUGH HIS FRIENDSHIP IS A TREASURE TO ME, ALL COMPANY HAS NOW BECOME A BURDEN.
WHEN THE MERE MEMORY OF WHAT I WAS CAN PROVOKE AN ATTACK SUCH AS THE ONE VOLSTAGG STOPPED,* I CAN NO LONGER REMAIN IN ASGARD.
I MUST CLOSE MY HEART TILL ALL THAT I WAS IS LESS THAN THE SHADOW OF A MEMORY...
...AND ASGARD HERSELF REMEMBERS ME NO MORE.
*THOR 338.

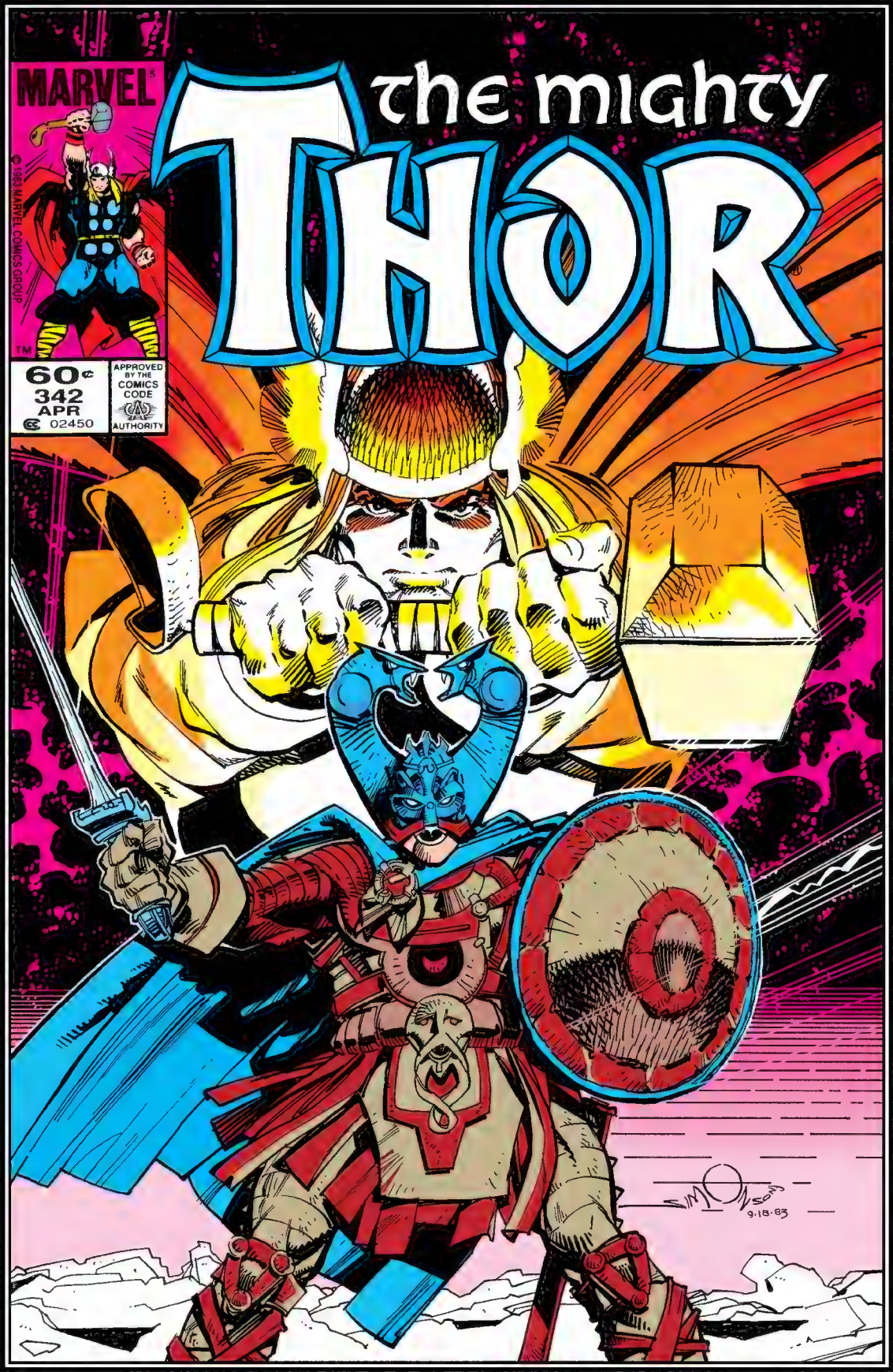
AS NIGHT DRAWS ON...
PERHAPS IN THE WILDERNESS OF THE OUTLANDS, I CAN LOSE MYSELF AND BE TORMENTED NO LONGER BY THE VISAGES OF THOSE I HAVE SLAIN.
BRAVE BALDER SEEMS A LITTLE PEAKED, MY MISTRESS, AND HE WANDERS DANGEROUSLY CLOSE TO YOUR OWN KINGDOM.
HE HAS BEEN STRANGELY CHANGED EVER SINCE HIS RETURN FROM HELA'S DOMAIN. MORE FEY, MORE... DANGEROUS.
I LIKE THAT.
PERHAPS I HAVE FINALLY TOUCHED HIS HEART.
WE WILL WATCH HIM, HAAG. BUT TAKE HEED AND SPREAD THE TIDINGS THROUGHOUT MY KINGDOM.
I'LL HAVE NO HARM DONE TO BALDER.
HIS WEAKENED STATE MAY PROVE TO BE HIS UNDOING AND MY TRIUMPH.
THIS TIME, KARNILLA SHALL WIN HIS SOUL.


ELSEWHERE, ON EARTH...
ONLY MY GREAT SPEED ENABLED ME TO DODGE FAFNIR'S FIERY BREATH!
YET THE FLAMES HAVE SET THE RUBBLE ALIGHT, AND THE FAIR LADY I DID SAVE MAY STILL PERISH IF I DO NOT ACT IMMEDIATELY.
COME, STORM! COME, LIGHTNING! RELEASE YOUR WRATH AND QUENCH THIS DEADLY BLAZE! YOUR MASTER COMMANDS!
BARROOM!
KRAAS
THE THUNDER! THE BLAZING HEAVENS! THOR TRIES TO DESTROY ME AS HE DEFEATED ME ONCE BEFORE!
BUT NOT THIS TIME!
FOR I WILL CHOOSE ANOTHER BATTLE SITE AT SOME FUTURE DATE AND THOR SHALL NOT TRAP ME BENEATH THE EARTH AGAIN!
THE FIRE IS NEARLY QUENCHED BUT MY FOE HAS FLED THE FIELD!
COME BACK, BASE COWARD! TURN AND FACE MY HAMMER'S RIGHTEOUS ANGER!
NO REPLY. FAFNIR HAS TUNNELED INTO THE SUBWAY SYSTEM BENEATH MANHATTAN LIKE SOME GIANT MOLE AND VANISHED!
EVEN NOW, THE SOUND OF HIM IS DIMINISHING--BUT WAIT, WHAT IS THIS NEW ROAR I HEAR?
'TIS LIKE THE SOUND OF MY OWN BELOVED THUNDER!


ODIN'S BLOOD! A WALL OF WATER!
FAFNIR HAS BROKEN THROUGH TO THE RIVER AND ESCAPED!
IF I CANNOT TURN THE WATER IN TIME, THOUSANDS OF INNOCENTS WILL PERISH MISERABLY IN THE FLOODING OF THE SUBWAY!
I SHALL WIELD MY MALLET AS NEVER BEFORE AND BRING DOWN THE ROOF OF THIS CAVERN!
SAKR
KATHASSH!
NOW QUICKLY, BEFORE I MYSELF AM ENTOMBED BENEATH THE FALLING ROCK, I MUST ESCAPE BACK UP THE TUNNEL TO SAFETY!
BEHIND HIM, THE THUNDERING AVALANCHE MEETS THE RAGING WATER AND THE CRASH SHAKES THE CITY TO ITS FOUNDATIONS!
BUT THE DAM HOLDS!
SAFE ENOUGH FOR THE MOMENT. BUT MY FOE HAS ESCAPED INTO THE RIVER!
HE IS BEYOND MY REACH FOR NOW AND I MUST BE DOUBLY ON MY GUARD AGAINST HIS NEXT ATTACK.
STILL, HOW CAN I TRULY DEFEAT HIM?
IN HIS EAGERNESS TO FLEE, FAFNIR FAILED TO REALIZE THAT HIS ARMOR IS VIRTUALLY PROOF AGAINST MY HAMMER!
FOR WHEN I STRUCK HIM WITH IT WITH ALL MY STRENGTH, HE WAS BARELY LIFTED FROM THE GROUND.
WHAT WILL I DO WHEN HE RETURNS AS HE MUST? WHAT POWER ON EARTH WILL BE ABLE TO STOP HIM?


AND INDEED, THE SELFSAME THOUGHTS ARE CROSSING ANOTHER'S MIND AT THAT VERY MOMENT A LONG WAY AWAY...
...AS LOKI, PRINCE OF ASGARD, SITS IN HIS CASTLE AND MUSES.
AH, MY BROTHER, IT MAY HAVE BEEN WORTH MY LIFE JUST TO SEE YOU WEARING A PONY TAIL!
BUT IT IS YOUR LIFE THAT IS DRAWING TO A CLOSE.
WHEN FAFNIR RECOVERS WHAT LITTLE WITS HE HAS, HE MAY REALIZE THAT HE COULD HAVE MASTERED THE FIGHT AGAINST YOU.
WHAT A FOOL! BLESSED WITH POWER LIKE THAT AND NOT AN OUNCE OF BRAIN IN HIS ENTIRE BODY.
STILL, POWER IS WHAT COUNTS AGAINST THOR AND FAFNIR HAS PLENTY TO SPARE.
PITY ABOUT LORELEI. BUT I SUPPOSE SHE'LL FIND SOME OTHER MALE TO PURSUE SHOULD THOR FINALLY HAVE MET HIS MATCH.
AND HOW RARE A TREAT TO WATCH HER HANG HERSELF FROM THE CRANE WHILE UNDER THE DRAGON'S SPELL.
FOOLISH GIRL! TO BELIEVE THAT HER SIMPLE WILES COULD SEDUCE A DRAGON TO HER WILL WHEN EVERYONE KNOWS THAT THE DRAGON IS THE MOST IRRESISTIBLE SEDUCER OF ALL.
A MOST SATISFACTORY ENTERTAINMENT.
SHATTER!
I CAN HARDLY WAIT TO SEE HOW IT COMES OUT!


MEANWHILE, ON EARTH...
GOOD! THE CAVITY WAS UNTOUCHED BY THE FIRE. THE LADY SEEMS TO BE FINE.
HEY! HEY, JARLSON! YOU GUYS OKAY? WE ALL RAN LIKE RABBITS WHEN WE SAW THAT DRAGON!
HOLY COW! I THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD FOR SURE!
WE'RE FINE, MR. SAPRISITI.
JUST A LITTLE SHAKEN UP.
JERRY. EVERYBODY WHO WORKS FOR ME CALLS ME JERRY. DON'T KNOW WHY, REALLY. MY NAME'S GUIDO!
MAN, I NEVER SAW NOTHIN' LIKE THE WAY YOU WENT UP THAT BUILDING. BUT I'LL TELL YOU THIS.
LOOKS LIKE WE'RE GONNA BE STARTIN' OVER HERE AND IF YOU WANT A JOB, YOU GOT IT!
OHHH. WHERE AM I? I REMEMBER SOME HORRIBLE DREAM, DOING THINGS AS THOUGH I COULDN'T HELP MYSELF. I... I THOUGHT...
JUST RELAX, MISS. YOU HAVE HAD ENOUGH EXCITEMENT FOR ONE DAY.
OOOH. WHO ARE YOU?
I THINK YOU'RE RIGHT. BUT I... I FEEL MUCH SAFER NOW. MMMMM.
WHY, SHE'S ASLEEP! PROBABLY THE SHOCK. I'LL TAKE HER OVER TO THE FOREMAN'S SHACK. HOW BEAUTIFUL SHE IS.
HOLD! THERE IT IS AGAIN!
SOMEONE IS CALLING ME, IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE VIKING WARRIORS WHO SAILED UNDER MY PROTECTION ALL THOSE YEARS AGO.
I KNOW NOT WHO WOULD REMEMBER OR BELIEVE AFTER SO MUCH TIME, BUT AS SOON AS I PLACE MY CHARGE UNDER MEDICAL SUPERVISION, I SHALL SEEK OUT THE VOICE...
...AND LEARN WHO CALLS TO ME FROM A BYGONE AGE!
NEXT: THE LAST Viking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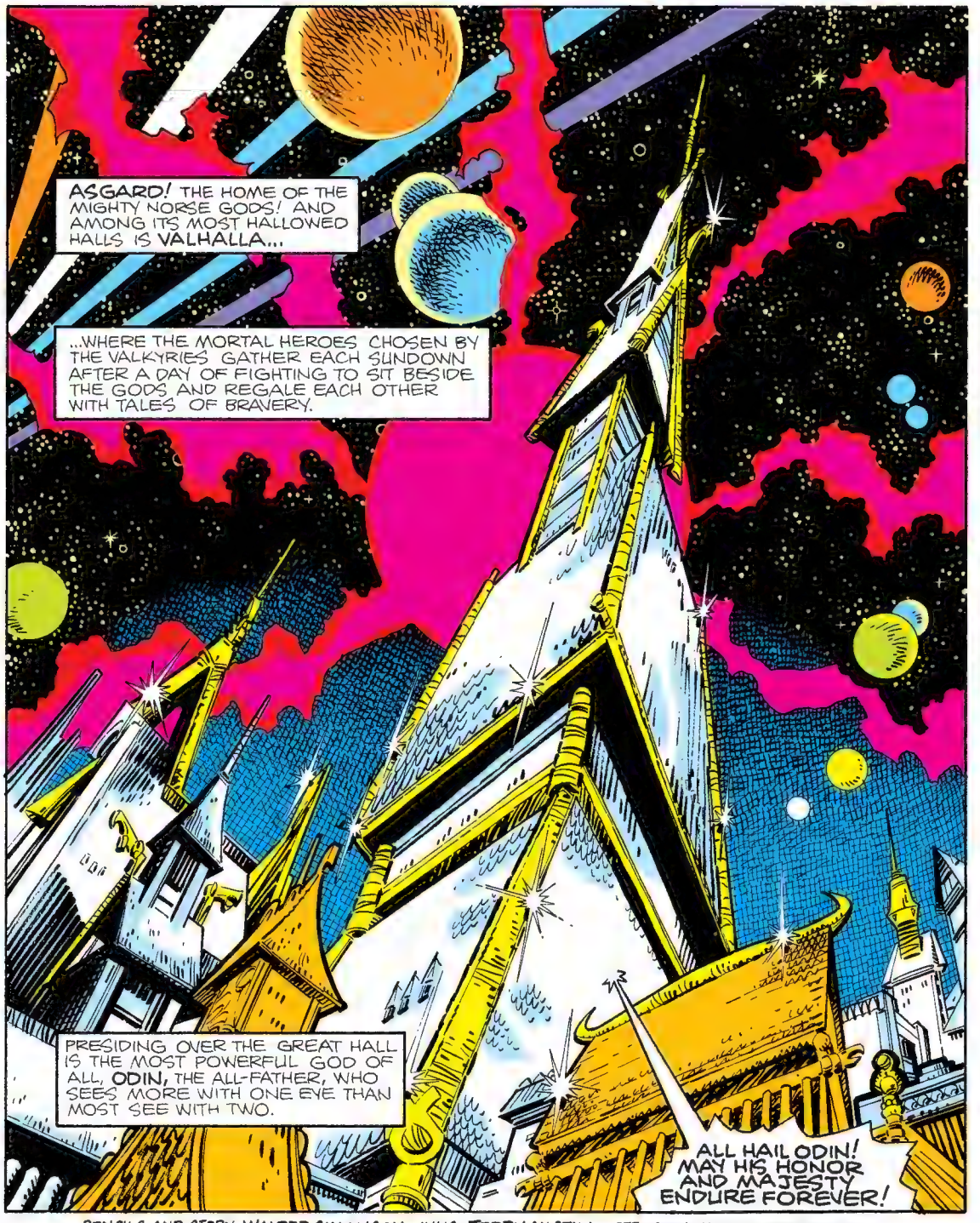
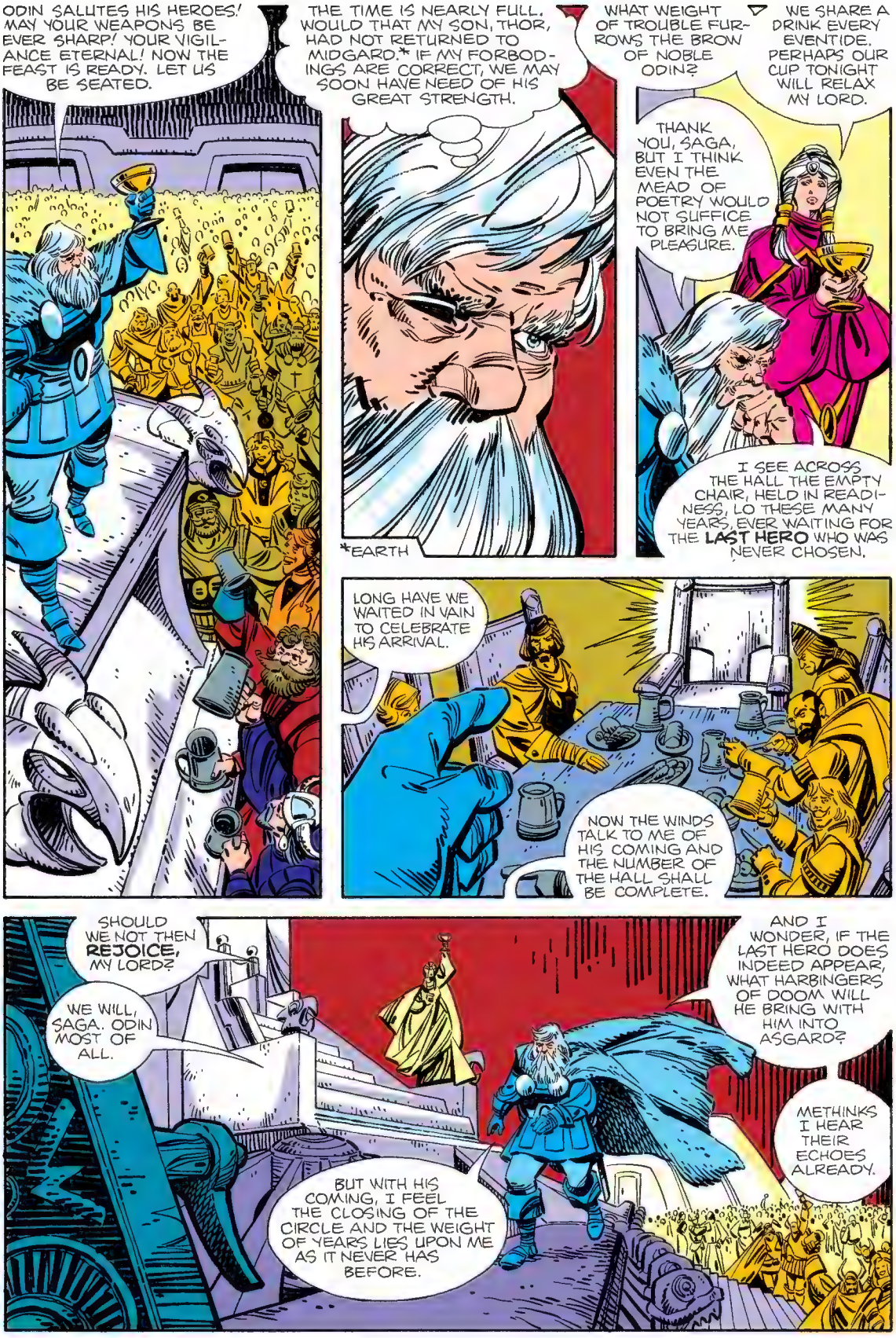
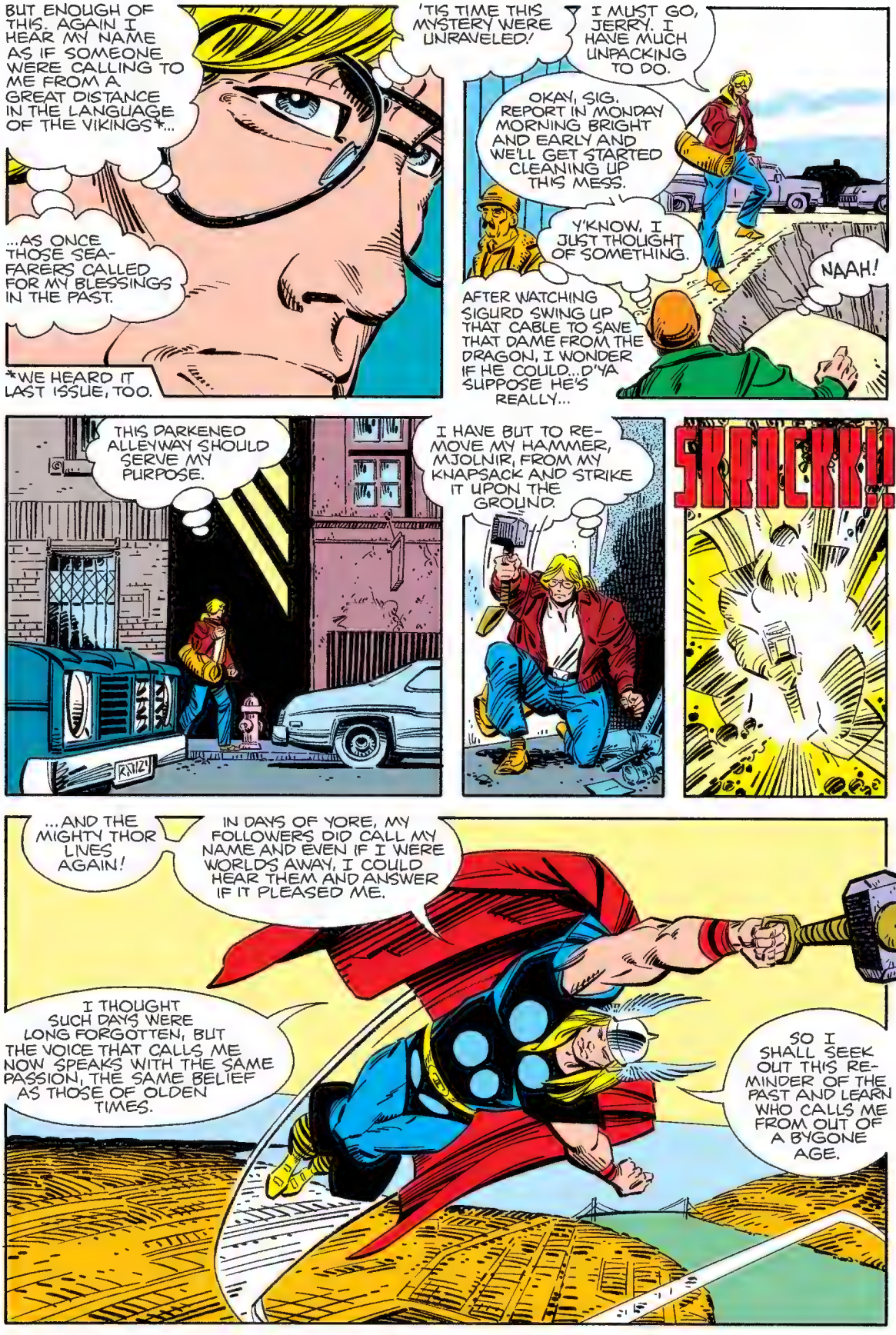

ASGARD! THE HOME OF THE MIGHTY NORSE GODS! AND AMONG ITS MOST HALLOWED HALLS IS VALHALLA...
...WHERE THE MORTAL HEROES CHOSEN BY THE VALKYRIES GATHER EACH SUNDOWN AFTER A DAY OF FIGHTING TO SIT BESIDE THE GODS AND REGALE EACH OTHER WITH TALES OF BRAVERY.
PRESIDING OVER THE GREAT HALL IS THE MOST POWERFUL GOD OF ALL, ODIN, THE ALL-FATHER, WHO SEES MORE WITH ONE EYE THAN MOST SEE WITH TWO.
ALL HAIL ODIN! MAY HIS HONOR AND MAJESTY ENDURE FOREVER!

PENCILS AND STORY: WALTER SIMONSON INKS: TERRY AUSTIN LETTERING: JOHN WORKMAN JR.
COLORS: CHRISTIE SCHEELE EDITING: MARK GRUENWALD EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: JIM SHOOTER

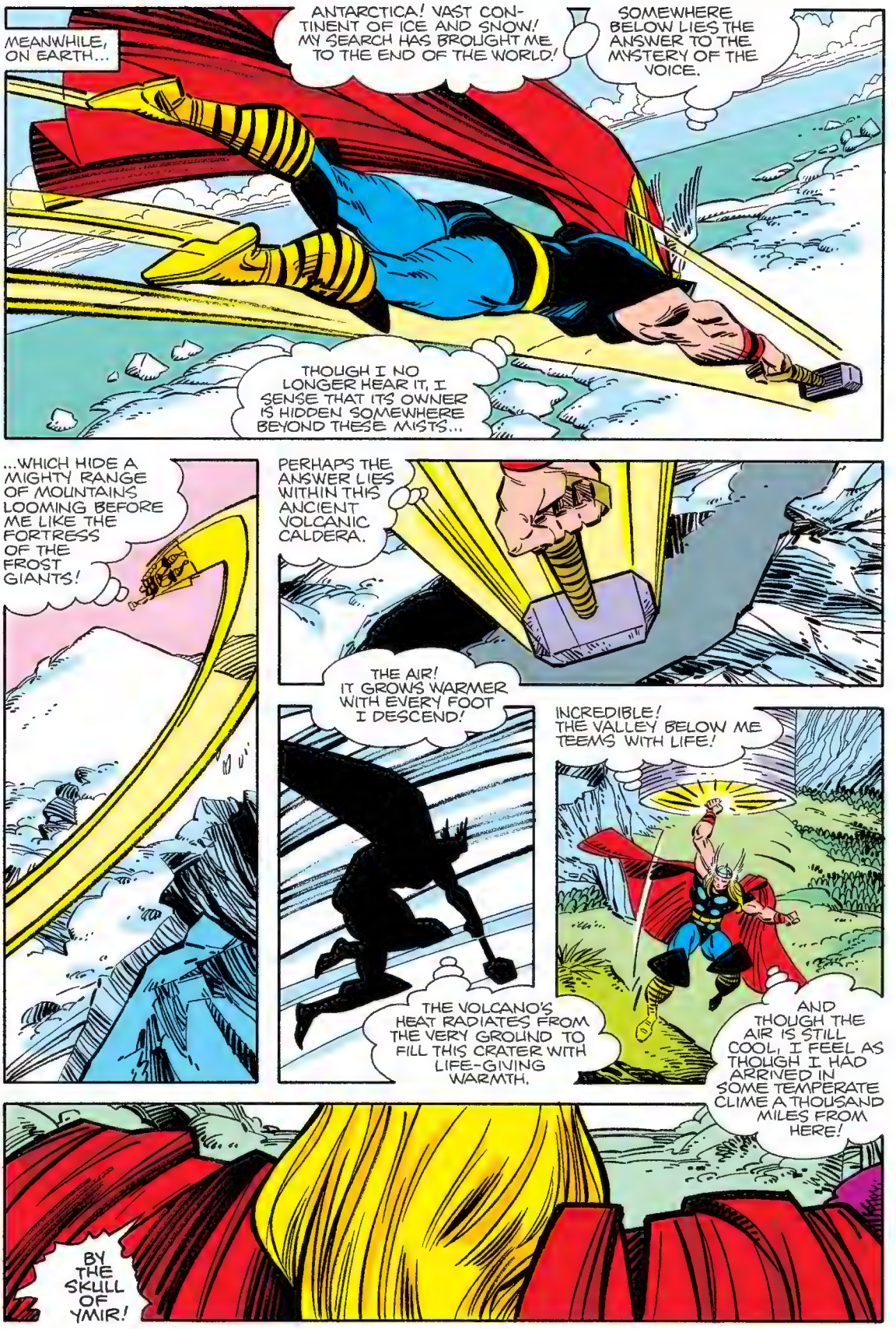

ODIN SALUTES HIS HEROES! MAY YOUR WEAPONS BE EVER SHARP! YOUR VIGILANCE ETERNAL! NOW THE FEAST IS READY. LET US BE SEATED.
THE TIME IS NEARLY FULL. WOULD THAT MY SON, THOR, HAD NOT RETURNED TO MIDGARD.* IF MY FORBODINGS ARE CORRECT, WE MAY SOON HAVE NEED OF HIS GREAT STRENGTH.
*EARTH
WHAT WEIGHT OF TROUBLE FURROWS THE BROW OF NOBLE ODIN?
WE SHARE A DRINK EVERY EVENTIDE. PERHAPS OUR CUP TONIGHT WILL RELAX MY LORD.
THANK YOU, SAGA, BUT I THINK EVEN THE MEAD OF POETRY WOULD NOT SUFFICE TO BRING ME PLEASURE.
I SEE ACROSS THE HALL THE EMPTY CHAIR, HELD IN READINESS, LO THESE MANY YEARS, EVER WAITING FOR THE LAST HERO WHO WAS NEVER CHOSEN.
LONG HAVE WE WAITED IN VAIN TO CELEBRATE HIS ARRIVAL.
NOW THE WINDS TALK TO ME OF HIS COMING AND THE NUMBER OF THE HALL SHALL BE COMPLETE.
SHOULD WE NOT THEN REJOICE, MY LORD?
WE WILL, SAGA. ODIN MOST OF ALL.
AND I WONDER, IF THE LAST HERO DOES INDEED APPEAR, WHAT HARBINGERS OF DOOM WILL HE BRING WITH HIM INTO ASGARD?
METHINKS I HEAR THEIR ECHOES ALREADY.
BUT WITH HIS COMING, I FEEL THE CLOSING OF THE CIRCLE AND THE WEIGHT OF YEARS LIES UPON ME AS IT NEVER HAS BEFORE.

ELSEWHERE, ON MANHATTAN ISLAND, AT THE CONSTRUCTION SITE DECIMATED BY THE DRAGON FAFNIR*...
*ALL LAST ISSUE.
WELL, I SURE HOPE THE BUILDER HAS INSURANCE THAT'LL COVER AGAINST DESTRUCTION BY DRAGONS. WADDA MESS.
WE WERE LUCKY THOR WAS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND SCARED HIM OFF.
I THOUGHT GOLDILOCKS WAS IN CHICAGO THESE DAYS.
PERHAPS HE IS REALLY A METS FAN AND RETURNED.
I DOUBT IT. GUYS LIKE HIM, THEY DON'T GET THE SAME WORRIES GUYS LIKE YOU 'N' ME DO. BESIDES, IT AIN'T BASEBALL SEASON!
HEY, MISTER! YOU WITH THE GLASSES!
JARLSON. SIGURD JARLSON.
WHATEVER.
WE'RE ABOUT TO TAKE THAT GIRL OFF TO THE HOSPITAL.
SAYS SHE WANTS TO THANK YOU FOR SAVING HER LIFE.
I'M PRETTY SURE SHE'S OKAY. JUST A LITTLE SHOCK, BUT YOU CAN'T BE TOO CAREFUL, YOU KNOW?
BROTHER, SHE SURE IS A LOOKER! YOU OUGHT TO GET HER PHONE NUMBER.

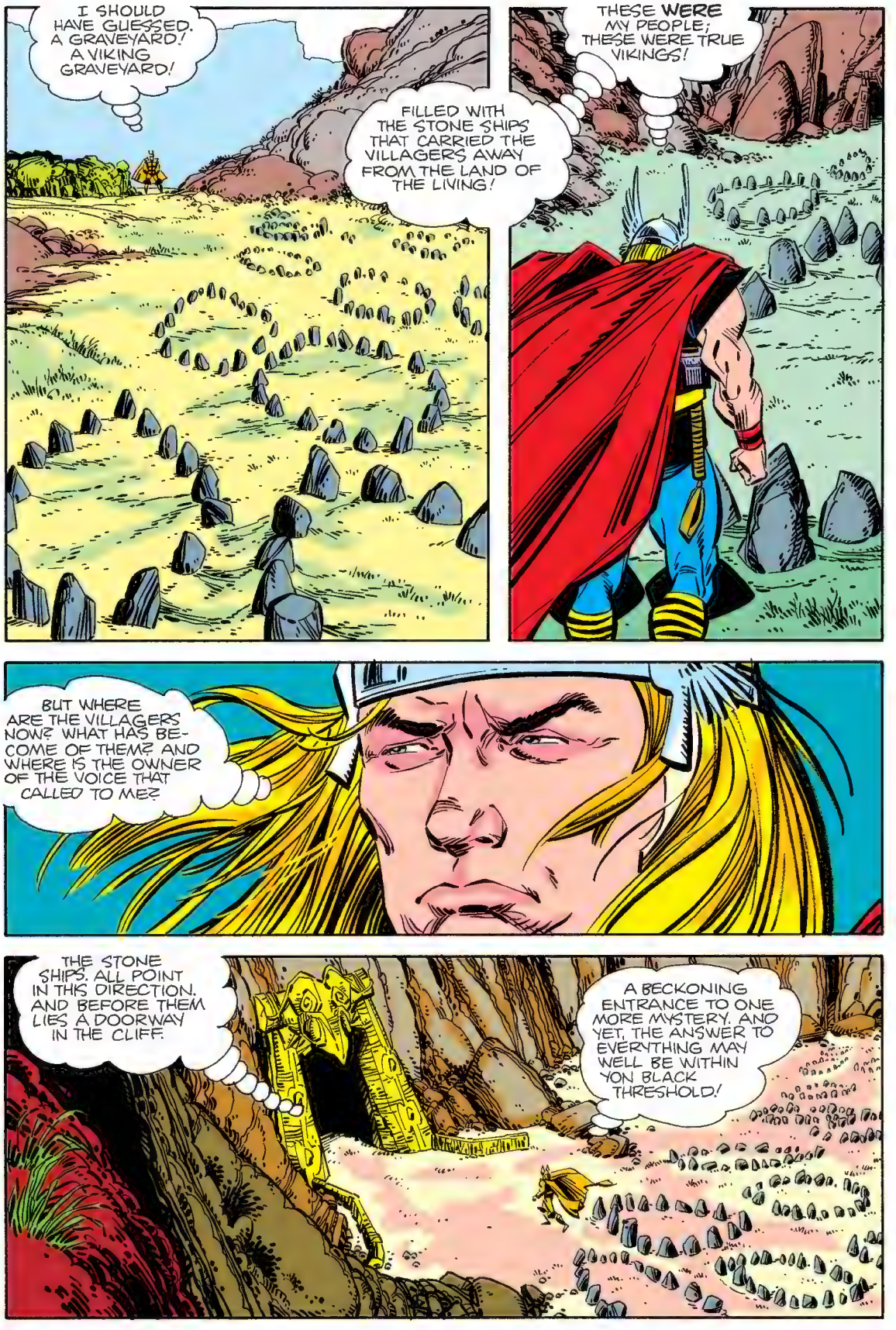
HELLO, MISS. GOOD TO SEE YOU'RE OKAY.
COULD YOU... COME A LITTLE CLOSER.
I'M GLAD YOU WERE STILL HERE. YOU SAVED ME FROM THE DRAGON AND I DON'T EVEN KNOW YOUR NAME.
SIGURD JARLSON, IF YOU CAN BELIEVE IT.
OH, I THINK THAT'S A WONDERFUL NAME. SO STRONG!
DO YOU LIVE IN THE CITY?
BROOKLYN, MISS. JUST MOVED IN LAST WEEK.
AS SOON AS I CAN, I'D LIKE TO BE ABLE TO THANK YOU PROPERLY FOR SAVING MY LIFE.
IF YOU'LL LET ME.
OH, AHEM... UH, CERTAINLY.
NO PROBLEM.
WONDERFUL. I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO IT.
LET'S GO, GUYS. WE'VE GOT TO GET ROLLING NOW IF YOU FOLKS DON'T MIND.
NO. NO, I DIDN'T, DID I?
YOU DOPE! YOU DIDN'T EVEN GET HER NAME!

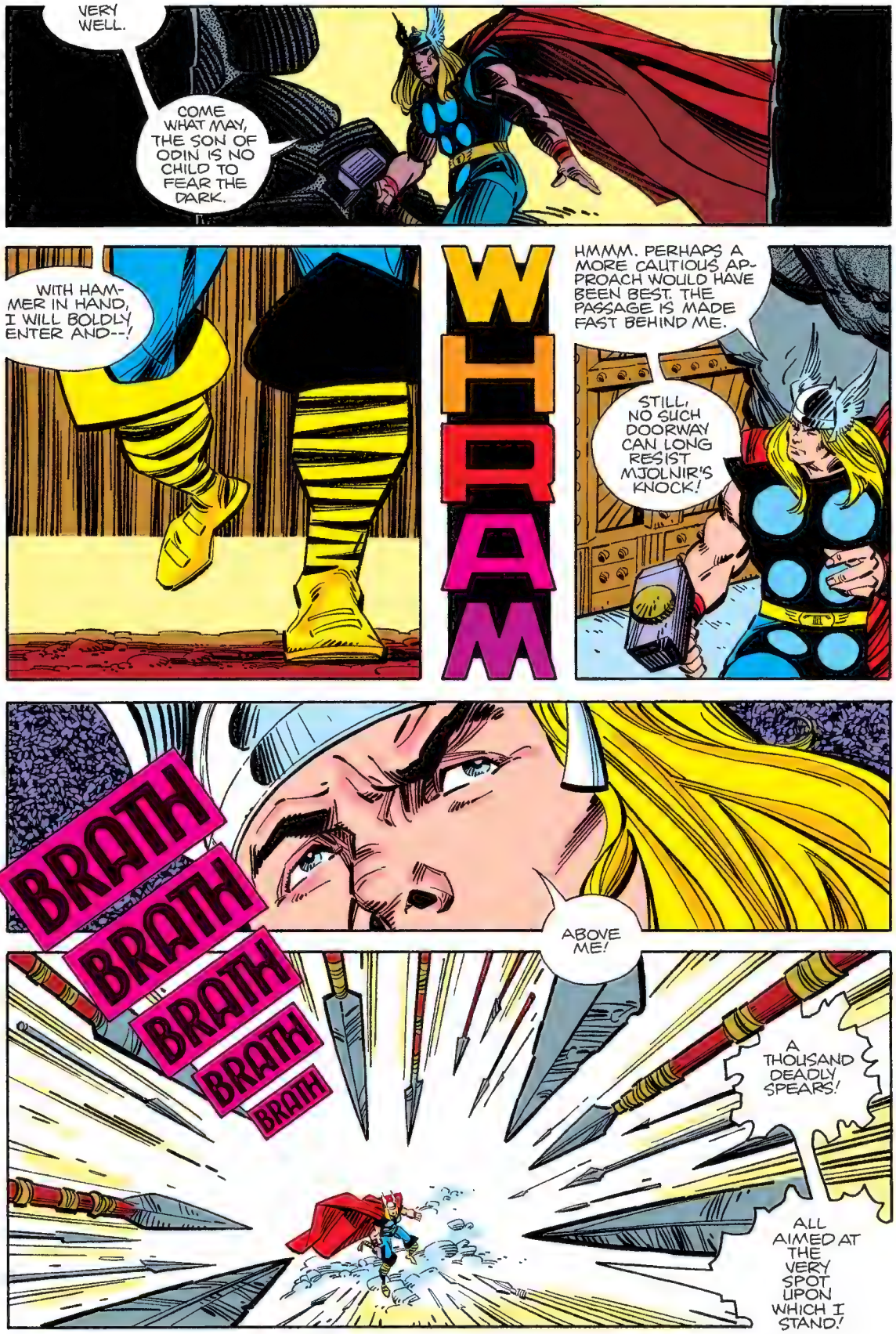

BUT ENOUGH OF THIS. AGAIN I HEAR MY NAME AS IF SOMEONE WERE CALLING TO ME FROM A GREAT DISTANCE IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE VIKINGS*...
...AS ONCE THOSE SEA-FARERS CALLED FOR MY BLESSINGS IN THE PAST.
*WE HEARD IT LAST ISSUE, TOO.
'TIS TIME THIS MYSTERY WERE UNRAVELED!
I MUST GO, JERRY. I HAVE MUCH UNPACKING TO DO.
OKAY, SIG, REPORT IN MONDAY MORNING BRIGHT AND EARLY AND WE'LL GET STARTED CLEANING UP THIS MESS.
Y'KNOW, I JUST THOUGHT OF SOMETHING.
NAAH!
AFTER WATCHING SIGURD SWING UP THAT CABLE TO SAVE THAT DAME FROM THE DRAGON, I WONDER IF HE COULD...D'YA SUPPOSE HE'S REALLY...
THIS DARKENED ALLEYWAY SHOULD SERVE MY PURPOSE.
I HAVE BUT TO RE-MOVE MY HAMMER, MJOLNIR, FROM MY KNAPSACK AND STRIKE IT UPON THE GROUND.
SKRACKK!!
...AND THE MIGHTY THOR LIVES AGAIN!
IN DAYS OF YORE, MY FOLLOWERS DID CALL MY NAME AND EVEN IF I WERE WORLDS AWAY, I COULD HEAR THEM AND ANSWER IF IT PLEASED ME.
I THOUGHT SUCH DAYS WERE LONG FORGOTTEN, BUT THE VOICE THAT CALLS ME NOW SPEAKS WITH THE SAME PASSION, THE SAME BELIEF AS THOSE OF OLDEN TIMES.
SO I SHALL SEEK OUT THIS RE-MINDER OF THE PAST AND LEARN WHO CALLS ME FROM OUT OF A BYGONE AGE.

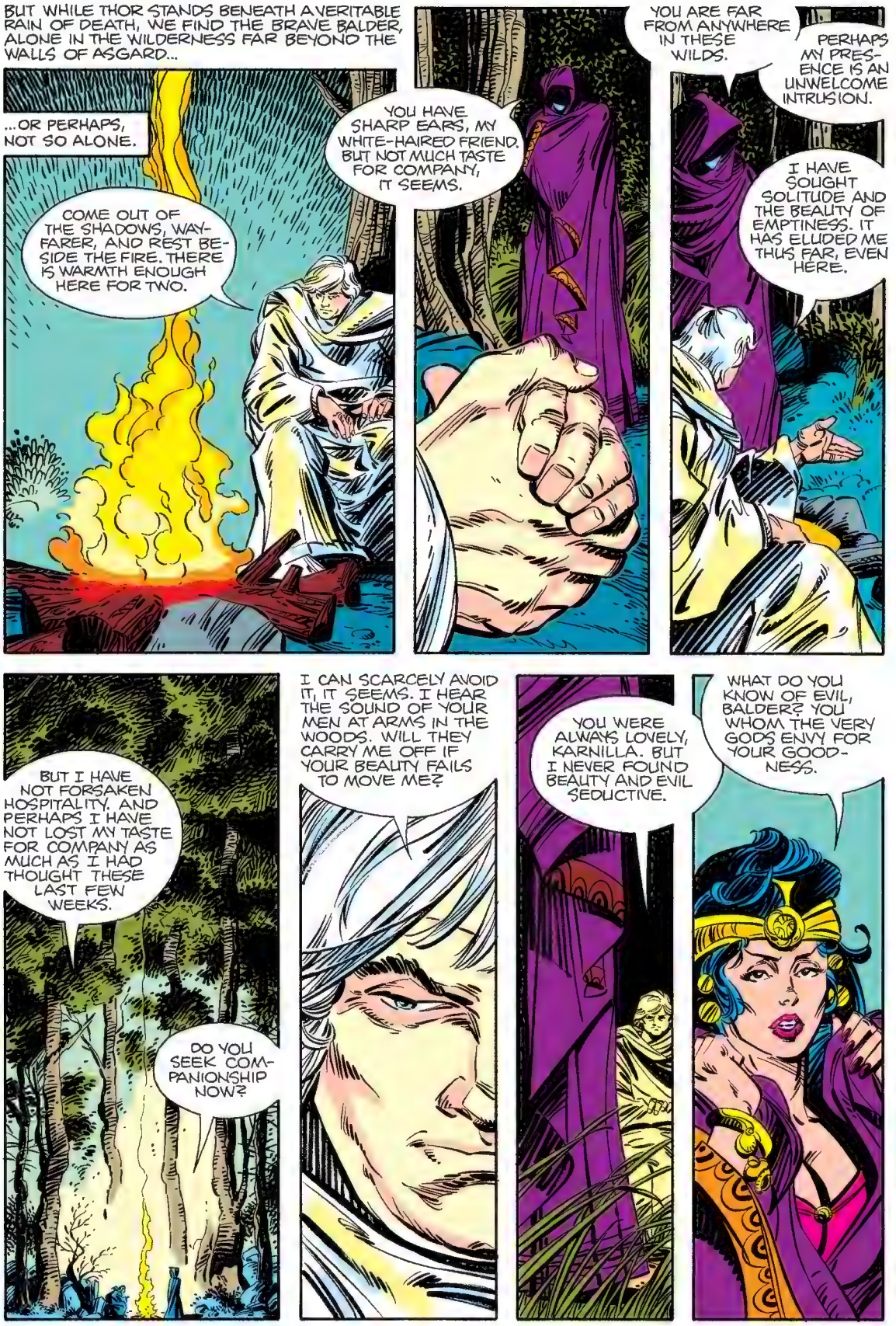
ELSEWHERE, BEYOND THE FIELDS WE KNOW, A MASSIVE FIGURE STANDS BEFORE A MIGHTY ANVIL AND A HALF FINISHED SWORD...
...AS A GREAT HOST MURMURS WITH ANTICIPATION...
...WHEN SUDDENLY...
LET ALL NOW BE SILENT.
THE BLACK RAVENS OF ODIN HAVE COME HIDING IN THE NIGHT, SEEKING ANSWERS FOR THEIR MASTER. BUT THE DARKNESS WILL NOT PROTECT THEM.
AND WITHOUT THE DARK TO HIDE THEM, THE RAVENS WILL DIE WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THEY HAVE OBTAINED!
LET THIS, THEN, BE THE FIRST BLOW AGAINST THE POWER OF ASGARD!
DOOM!

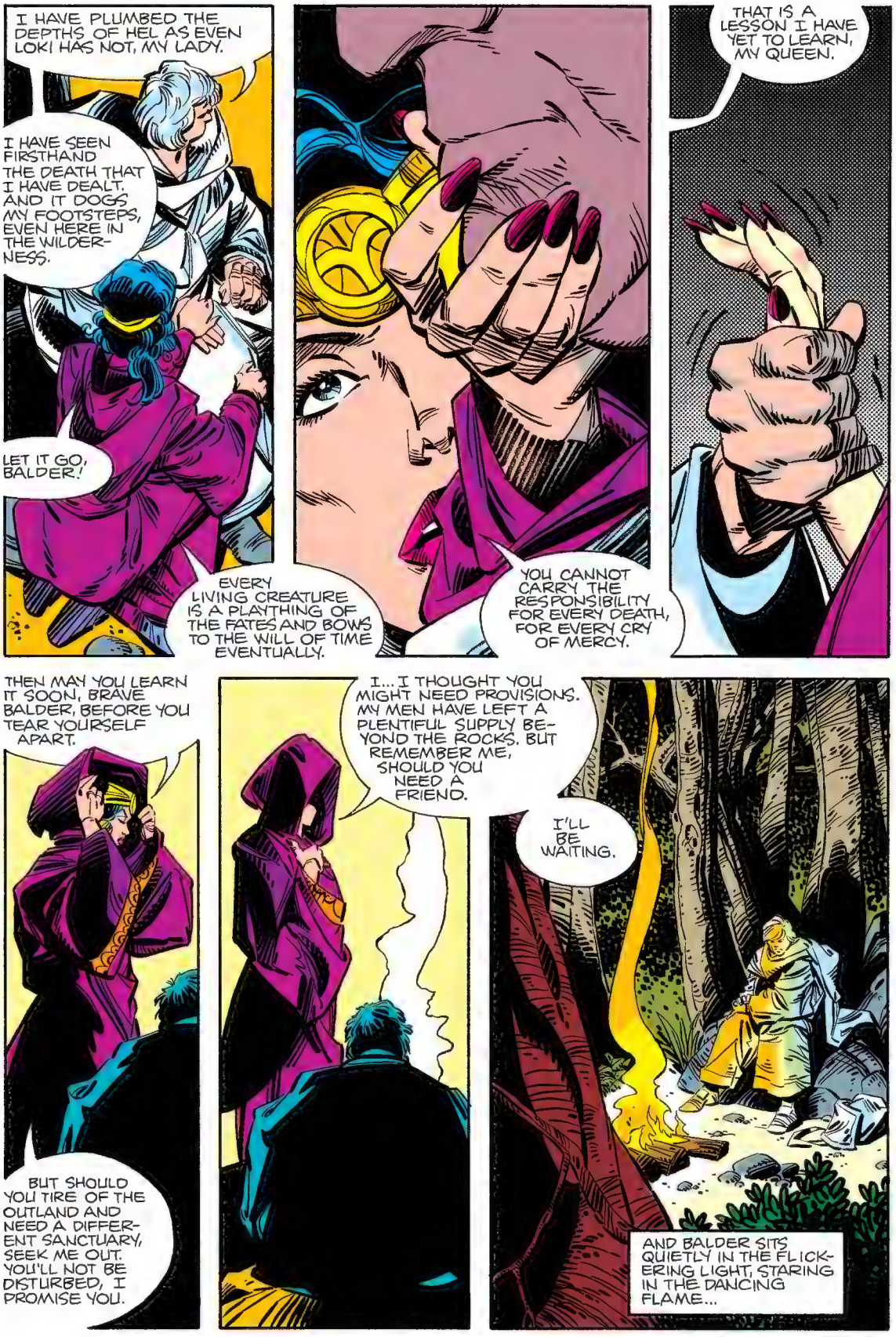

MEANWHILE, ON EARTH...
ANTARCTICA! VAST CONTINENT OF ICE AND SNOW! MY SEARCH HAS BROUGHT ME TO THE END OF THE WORLD!
SOMEWHERE BELOW LIES THE ANSWER TO THE MYSTERY OF THE VOICE.
THOUGH I NO LONGER HEAR IT, I SENSE THAT ITS OWNER IS HIDDEN SOMEWHERE BEYOND THESE MISTS...
...WHICH HIDE A MIGHTY RANGE OF MOUNTAINS LOOMING BEFORE ME LIKE THE FORTRESS OF THE FROST GIANTS!
PERHAPS THE ANSWER LIES WITHIN THIS ANCIENT VOLCANIC CALDERA.
THE AIR! IT GROWS WARMER WITH EVERY FOOT I DESCEND!
INCREDIBLE! THE VALLEY BELOW ME TEEMS WITH LIFE!
THE VOLCANO'S HEAT RADIATES FROM THE VERY GROUND TO FILL THIS CRATER WITH LIFE-GIVING WARMTH.
AND THOUGH THE AIR IS STILL COOL, I FEEL AS THOUGH I HAD ARRIVED IN SOME TEMPERATE CLIME A THOUSAND MILES FROM HERE!
BY THE SKULL OF YMIR!

A VILLAGE! A VILLAGE LIKE UNTO THE TOWNS OF THE VIKINGS THEMSELVES! NESTLED IN THE VERY HEART OF THE VOLCANO'S THROAT!
HIDDEN BELOW THE MISTS OF THE ICY LAND FROM ANY WHO MIGHT SPY IT!
BUT NOT A SOUL CAN BE SEEN.
STAND FORTH! ARE THERE ANY ABOUT TO WELCOME A DISTANT TRAVELER?
NAUGHT BUT SILENCE.
AND YET, THE VOICE CAME FROM HERE, I AM SURE OF IT!
STAND A MOMENT. WHAT FRIENDLY SCENT IS THIS?
A COOKING POT, NEARLY FULL OF STEW.
AND FRESH, THOUGH COOL.
UM. NOT BAD.
THIS IS NO DESERTED VILLAGE, NO MATTER HOW IT MIGHT APPEAR!
PERHAPS THE VILLAGERS HAVE FLED FROM THE STRANGER AND HIDDEN.
AND YET, NOW THAT I AM CLOSER, I DO SEE THAT SOME OF THE HUTS HAVE BEEN LONG ABANDONED.
PERHAPS BEYOND THIS WALL, I MAY DISCOVER SOME ANSWER TO THESE RIDDLES.

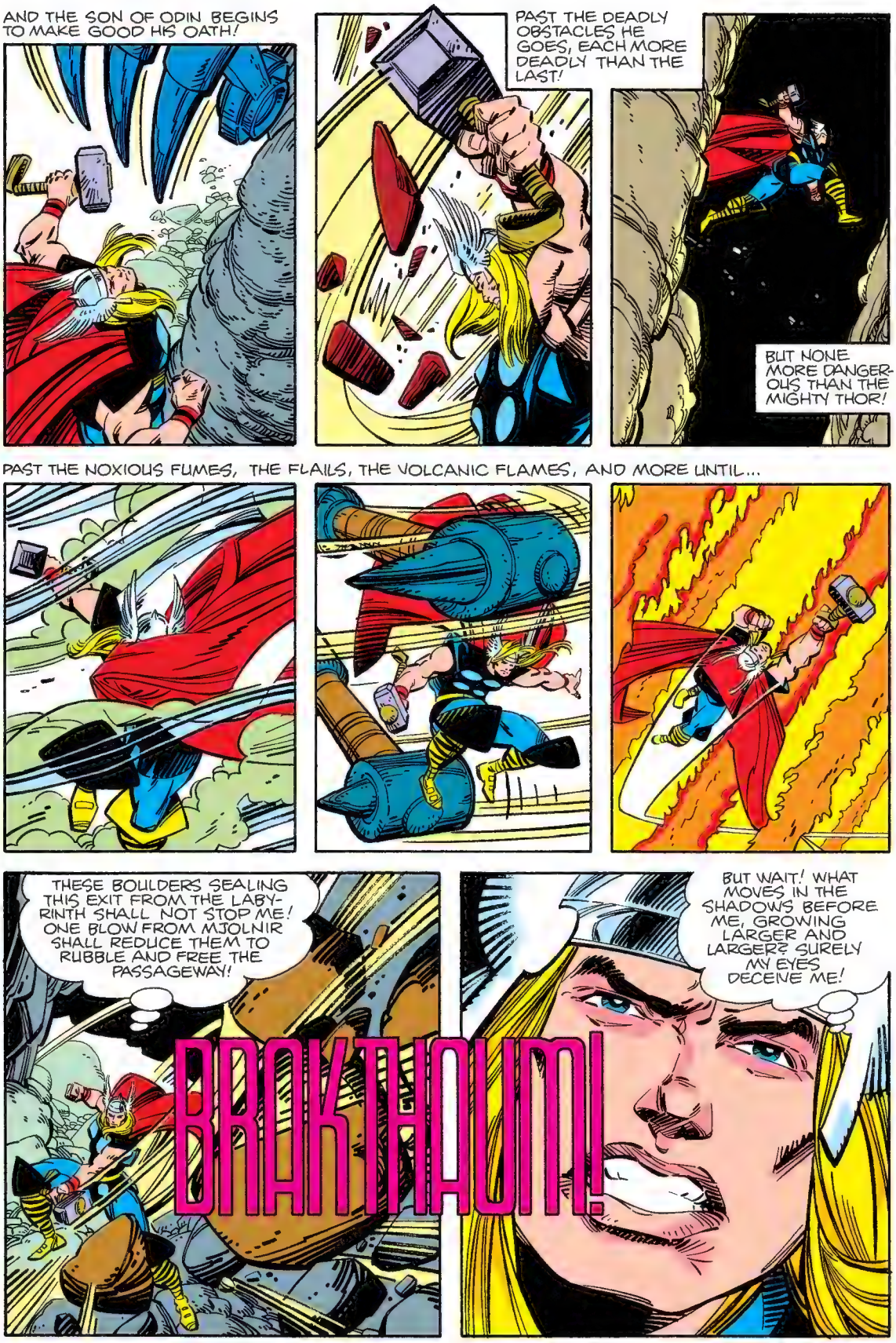

I SHOULD HAVE GUESSED. A GRAVEYARD! A VIKING GRAVEYARD!
FILLED WITH THE STONE SHIPS THAT CARRIED THE VILLAGERS AWAY FROM THE LAND OF THE LIVING!
THESE WERE MY PEOPLE; THESE WERE TRUE VIKINGS!
BUT WHERE ARE THE VILLAGERS NOW? WHAT HAS BECOME OF THEM? AND WHERE IS THE OWNER OF THE VOICE THAT CALLED TO ME?
THE STONE SHIPS. ALL POINT IN THIS DIRECTION. AND BEFORE THEM LIES A DOORWAY IN THE CLIFF.
A BECKONING ENTRANCE TO ONE MORE MYSTERY. AND YET, THE ANSWER TO EVERYTHING MAY WELL BE WITHIN YON BLACK THRESHOLD!


VERY WELL.
COME WHAT MAY, THE SON OF ODIN IS NO CHILD TO FEAR THE DARK.
WITH HAMMER IN HAND, I WILL BOLDLY ENTER AND--!
WHRAM
HMMM. PERHAPS A MORE CAUTIOUS APPROACH WOULD HAVE BEEN BEST. THE PASSAGE IS MADE FAST BEHIND ME.
STILL, NO SUCH DOORWAY CAN LONG RESIST MJOLNIR'S KNOCK!
BRATH
BRATH
BRATH
BRATH
BRATH
ABOVE ME!
A THOUSAND DEADLY SPEARS!
ALL AIMED AT THE VERY SPOT UPON WHICH I STAND!

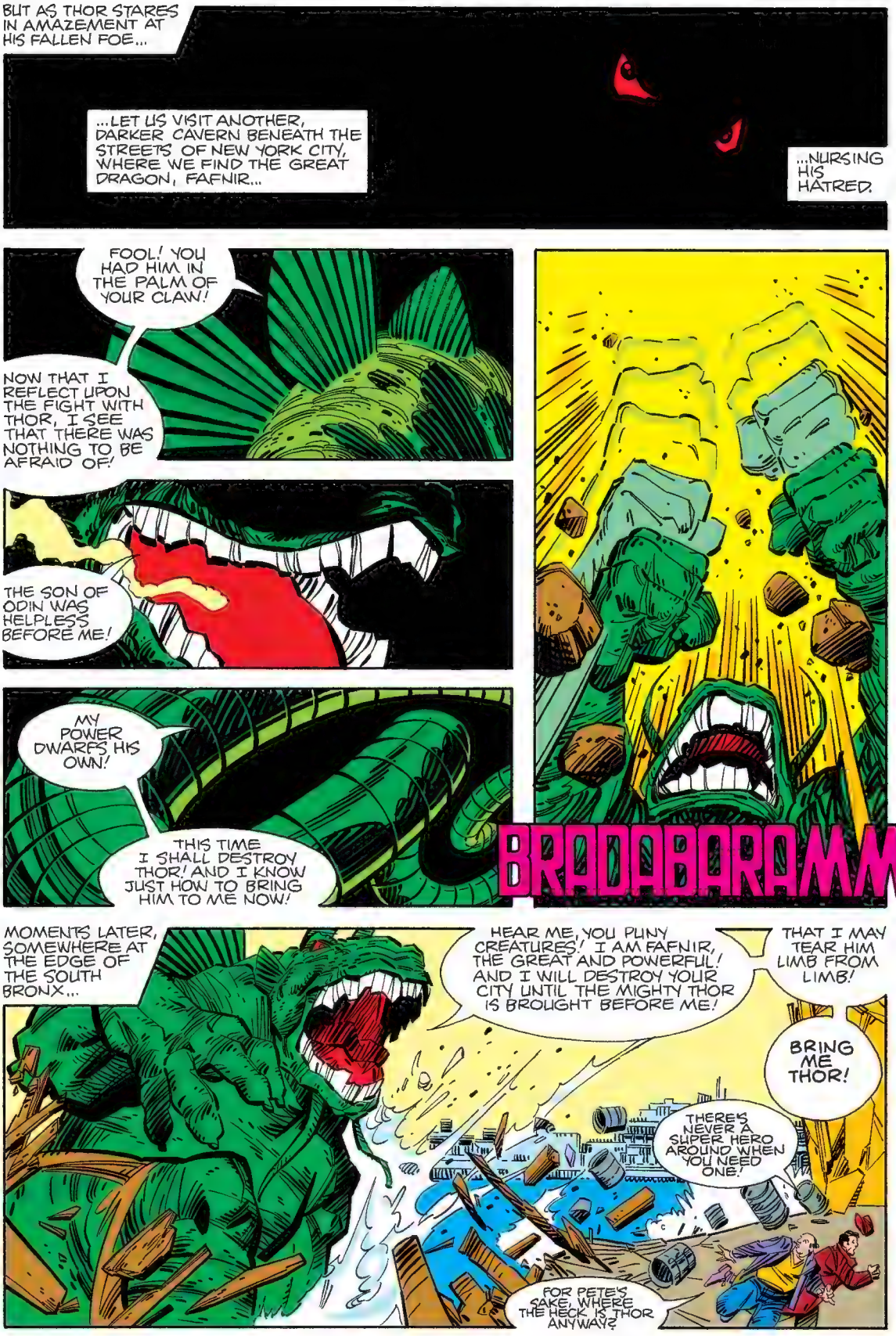

BUT WHILE THOR STANDS BENEATH A VERITABLE RAIN OF DEATH, WE FIND THE BRAVE BALDER, ALONE IN THE WILDERNESS FAR BEYOND THE WALLS OF ASGARD...
...OR PERHAPS, NOT SO ALONE.
COME OUT OF THE SHADOWS, WAYFARER, AND REST BESIDE THE FIRE. THERE IS WARMTH ENOUGH HERE FOR TWO.
YOU HAVE SHARP EARS, MY WHITE-HAIRED FRIEND. BUT NOT MUCH TASTE FOR COMPANY, IT SEEMS.
YOU ARE FAR FROM ANYWHERE IN THESE WILDS.
PERHAPS MY PRESENCE IS AN UNWELCOME INTRUSION.
I HAVE SOUGHT SOLITUDE AND THE BEAUTY OF EMPTINESS. IT HAS ELUDED ME THUS FAR, EVEN HERE.
BUT I HAVE NOT FORSAKEN HOSPITALITY. AND PERHAPS I HAVE NOT LOST MY TASTE FOR COMPANY AS MUCH AS I HAD THOUGHT THESE LAST FEW WEEKS.
DO YOU SEEK COMPANIONSHIP NOW?
I CAN SCARCELY AVOID IT, IT SEEMS. I HEAR THE SOUND OF YOUR MEN AT ARMS IN THE WOODS. WILL THEY CARRY ME OFF IF YOUR BEAUTY FAILS TO MOVE ME?
YOU WERE ALWAYS LOVELY, KARNILLA. BUT I NEVER FOUND BEAUTY AND EVIL SEDUCTIVE.
WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF EVIL, BALDER? YOU WHOM THE VERY GODS ENVY FOR YOUR GOODNESS.

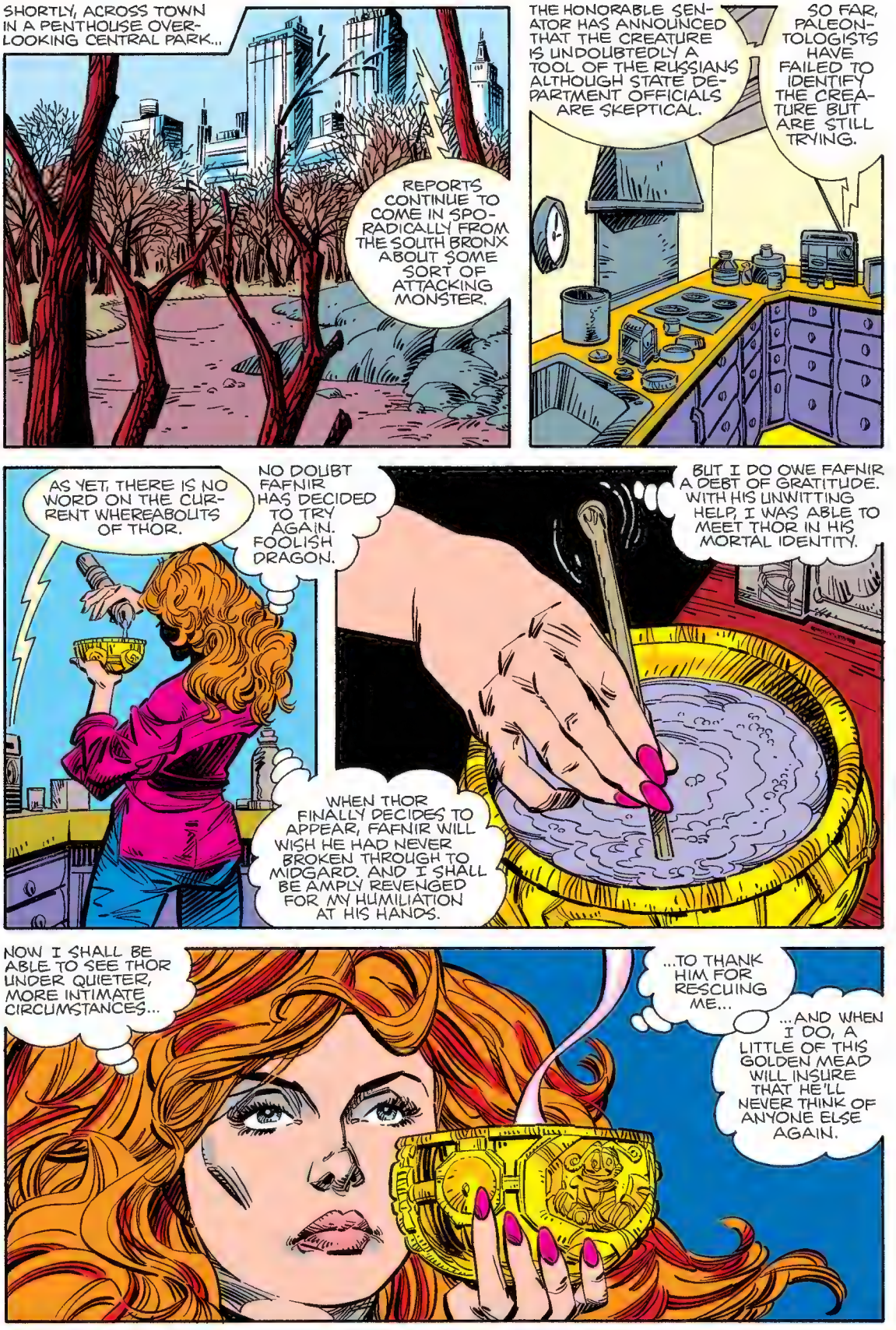

I HAVE PLUMBED THE DEPTHS OF HEL AS EVEN LOKI HAS NOT, MY LADY.
I HAVE SEEN FIRSTHAND THE DEATH THAT I HAVE DEALT. AND IT DOGS MY FOOTSTEPS, EVEN HERE IN THE WILDERNESS.
LET IT GO, BALDER!
EVERY LIVING CREATURE IS A PLAYTHING OF THE FATES AND BOWS TO THE WILL OF TIME EVENTUALLY.
YOU CANNOT CARRY THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR EVERY DEATH, FOR EVERY CRY OF MERCY.
THAT IS A LESSON I HAVE YET TO LEARN, MY QUEEN.
THEN MAY YOU LEARN IT SOON, BRAVE BALDER, BEFORE YOU TEAR YOURSELF APART.
BUT SHOULD YOU TIRE OF THE OUTLAND AND NEED A DIFFERENT SANCTUARY, SEEK ME OUT. YOU'LL NOT BE DISTURBED, I PROMISE YOU.
I... I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT NEED PROVISIONS. MY MEN HAVE LEFT A PLENTIFUL SUPPLY BEYOND THE ROCKS. BUT REMEMBER ME, SHOULD YOU NEED A FRIEND.
I'LL BE WAITING.
AND BALDER SITS QUIETLY IN THE FLICKERING LIGHT, STARING IN THE DANCING FLAME...

MEANWHILE, ON EARTH...
MY WHIRLING HAMMER IS SUFFICIENT TO DESTROY THE DEADLY SPEARS.
YET NOW I AM ANGRY! I WOULD LEARN WHAT LIES AT THE END OF THIS DANGEROUS TUNNEL! AND LEARN IT, I SHALL!
RUMMBLE!
A DEADFALL! THERE ARE SOME WHO APPARENTLY WISH TO KEEP THE TUNNELS SECRET HIDDEN.
THAT SMALL SIDE CAVERN! QUICKLY! I'VE ONLY A MOMENT TO REACH IT!
SAFE! BARELY! I SEE I AM NOT THE FIRST TO ATTEMPT TO PENETRATE THE LABYRINTH'S SINISTER HEART!
BUT BY THE BURNING EYE OF MY FATHER, I SHALL BE THE FIRST TO SUCCEED!
SO SWEARS THOR!


AND THE SON OF ODIN BEGINS TO MAKE GOOD HIS OATH!
PAST THE DEADLY OBSTACLES HE GOES, EACH MORE DEADLY THAN THE LAST!
BUT NONE MORE DANGEROUS THAN THE MIGHTY THOR!
PAST THE NOXIOUS FUMES, THE FLAILS, THE VOLCANIC FLAMES, AND MORE UNTIL...
THESE BOULDERS SEALING THIS EXIT FROM THE LABYRINTH SHALL NOT STOP ME! ONE BLOW FROM MJOLNIR SHALL REDUCE THEM TO RUBBLE AND FREE THE PASSAGEWAY!
BRAKTHAUM!
BUT WAIT! WHAT MOVES IN THE SHADOWS BEFORE ME, GROWING LARGER AND LARGER? SURELY MY EYES DECEIVE ME!

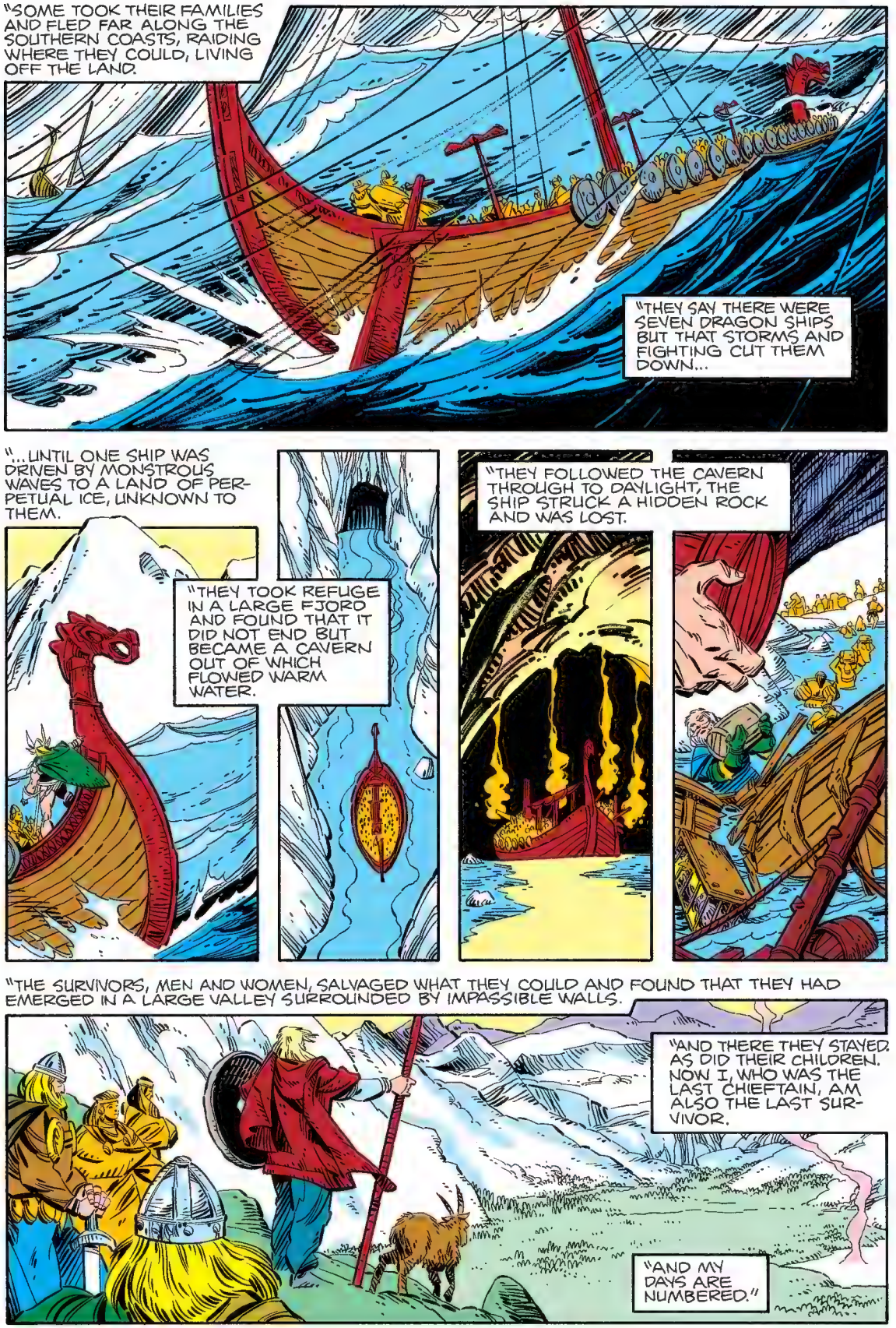
LOOK WELL, LITTLE GOD, UPON THE VISAGE OF DEATH!
NONE HAVE EVER VENTURED SO FAR INTO THE LABYRINTH OF TERROR. NONE HAVE PROVEN WORTHY TO DIE BY MY OWN SPEAR.
SPEAK YOUR NAME, LITTLE ONE, AND WELCOME ME!
I AM THOR, GOD OF THUNDER, SON OF NOBLE ODIN, AND HEIR TO THE THRONE OF ASGARD!
IF I AM TO JOURNEY TODAY TO THE HALLS OF DEATH, THEN LET IT BE IN THE FIGHTING FURY OF MY WARRIOR'S WRATH.
HAVE AT YOU, VILLAIN. WERE YOU HELA'S OWN KIN, YOU WOULD NOT FIND ME SIMPLE PREY.
THRAKKSH!
WHA--! MY FOE'S HELMET! IT HAS COME LOOSE, FALLING AWAY TO REVEAL HIS FACE!
BY THE GODS... I CANNOT BELIEVE IT!

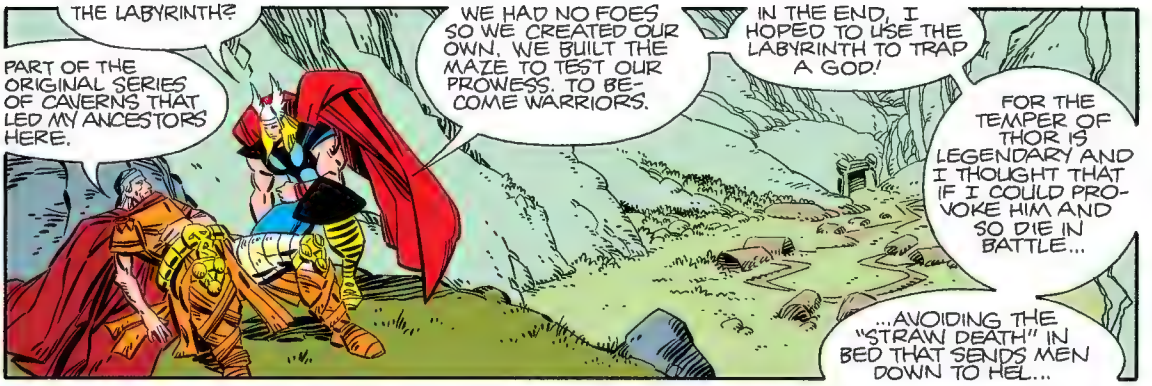

BUT AS THOR STARES IN AMAZEMENT AT HIS FALLEN FOE...
...LET US VISIT ANOTHER, DARKER CAVERN BENEATH THE STREETS OF NEW YORK CITY, WHERE WE FIND THE GREAT DRAGON, FAFNIR...
...NURSING HIS HATRED.
FOOL! YOU HAD HIM IN THE PALM OF YOUR CLAW!
NOW THAT I REFLECT UPON THE FIGHT WITH THOR, I SEE THAT THERE WAS NOTHING TO BE AFRAID OF!
THE SON OF ODIN WAS HELPLESS BEFORE ME!
MY POWER DWARFS HIS OWN!
THIS TIME I SHALL DESTROY THOR! AND I KNOW JUST HOW TO BRING HIM TO ME NOW!
BRADABARAMM!
MOMENTS LATER, SOMEWHERE AT THE EDGE OF THE SOUTH BRONX...
HEAR ME, YOU PUNY CREATURES! I AM FAFNIR, THE GREAT AND POWERFUL! AND I WILL DESTROY YOUR CITY UNTIL THE MIGHTY THOR IS BROUGHT BEFORE ME!
THAT I MAY TEAR HIM LIMB FROM LIMB!
BRING ME THOR!
THERE'S NEVER A SUPER HERO AROUND WHEN YOU NEED ONE!
FOR PETE'S SAKE, WHERE THE HECK IS THOR ANYWAY?

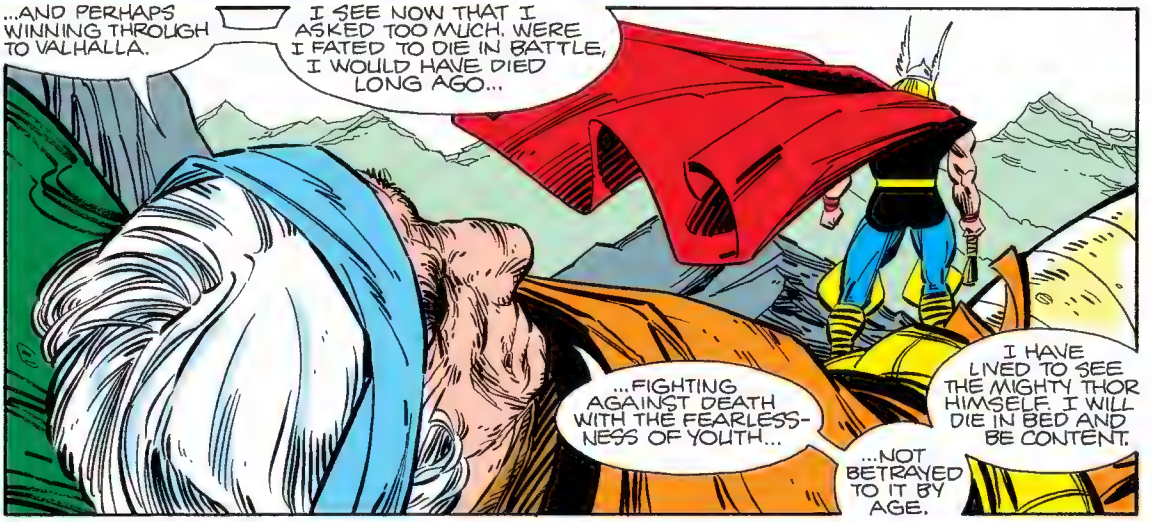

SHORTLY, ACROSS TOWN IN A PENTHOUSE OVERLOOKING CENTRAL PARK...
REPORTS CONTINUE TO COME IN SPORADICALLY FROM THE SOUTH BRONX ABOUT SOME SORT OF ATTACKING MONSTER.
THE HONORABLE SENATOR HAS ANNOUNCED THAT THE CREATURE IS UNDOUBTEDLY A TOOL OF THE RUSSIANS ALTHOUGH STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS ARE SKEPTICAL.
SO FAR, PALEONTOLOGISTS HAVE FAILED TO IDENTIFY THE CREATURE BUT ARE STILL TRYING.
AS YET, THERE IS NO WORD ON THE CURRENT WHEREABOUTS OF THOR.
NO DOUBT FAFNIR HAS DECIDED TO TRY AGAIN. FOOLISH DRAGON.
BUT I DO OWE FAFNIR A DEBT OF GRATITUDE. WITH HIS UNWITTING HELP, I WAS ABLE TO MEET THOR IN HIS MORTAL IDENTITY.
WHEN THOR FINALLY DECIDES TO APPEAR, FAFNIR WILL WISH HE HAD NEVER BROKEN THROUGH TO MIDGARD. AND I SHALL BE AMPLY REVENGED FOR MY HUMILIATION AT HIS HANDS.
NOW I SHALL BE ABLE TO SEE THOR UNDER QUIETER, MORE INTIMATE CIRCUMSTANCES...
...TO THANK HIM FOR RESCUING ME...
...AND WHEN I DO, A LITTLE OF THIS GOLDEN MEAD WILL INSURE THAT HE'LL NEVER THINK OF ANYONE ELSE AGAIN.

BUT UNAWARE OF THE VARIOUS DESIGNS UPON HIM, THE MIGHTY THOR STARES DOWN AT THE FIGURE BEFORE HIM...
AN OLD MAN!
...STUNNED TO DISCOVER THAT HIS ERSTWHILE FOE IS...
AT LAST, YOU HAVE COME! :GASP: NOW, MY LORD, DO NOT SPARE ME. FINISH THE JOB! :GASP:
NAY, I'LL NOT KILL AN ANCIENT, NO MATTER WHAT HE'S DONE.
BUT THE AIR IS FOUL AND STIFLING HERE WITHIN THE VOLCANO'S TUNNELS. LET ME CARRY YOU OUT OF THIS DEADLY PLACE.
THEN WE SHALL DISCOVER THE NATURE OF THIS BOLD WARRIOR WHO WOULD CHALLENGE THE GODS!
WHRIPPPAUM!

AT LAST WE'VE REACHED CLEAN AIR.
NOW LET ME GENTLY REMOVE THE ARMOR THAT WEIGHS HIM DOWN.
AS I THOUGHT. THE GREAT STATURE OF THE WARRIOR WAS MAINLY THE BULK OF THE ARMOR ITSELF.
THOUGH IN HIS YOUTH, THIS ANCIENT WAS NO DOUBT A LARGE AND DOUGHTY FIGHTER IN HIS OWN RIGHT.
BUT TIME AND AGE HAVE TAKEN THEIR TOLL AS WITH ALL MORTALS.
YOU HAVE LET ME LIVE, LORD THOR. DESERVEDLY SO, I EXPECT.
WHO ARE YOU, GRANDFATHER?
EILIF THE LOST.
I SHOULD NEVER HAVE TRIED TO TRICK YOU INTO KILLING ME. THE GODS KNOW BEST AND IF I MUST DIE THE STRAW DEATH, SUCH IS MY FATE.
HOW CAME YOU HERE, GRANDFATHER, TO THIS PLACE FORGOTTEN EVEN BY THE GODS?
MY FATHER'S FATHERS FOUND THIS VALLEY LONG AGO.
"IT WAS AFTER THE DEFEAT OF KING HARALD HARDRAADA IN THE YEAR 1066 BY CHRISTIAN RECKONING.
"WHEN KING HARALD WAS SLAIN IN THE INVASION OF ENGLAND, HIS WARRIORS WERE SCATTERED.


"SOME TOOK THEIR FAMILIES AND FLED FAR ALONG THE SOUTHERN COASTS, RAIDING WHERE THEY COULD, LIVING OFF THE LAND.
"THEY SAY THERE WERE SEVEN DRAGON SHIPS BUT THAT STORMS AND FIGHTING CUT THEM DOWN...
"...UNTIL ONE SHIP WAS DRIVEN BY MONSTROUS WAVES TO A LAND OF PERPETUAL ICE, UNKNOWN TO THEM.
"THEY TOOK REFUGE IN A LARGE FJORD AND FOUND THAT IT DID NOT END BUT BECAME A CAVERN OUT OF WHICH FLOWED WARM WATER.
"THEY FOLLOWED THE CAVERN THROUGH TO DAYLIGHT, THE SHIP STRUCK A HIDDEN ROCK AND WAS LOST.
"THE SURVIVORS, MEN AND WOMEN, SALVAGED WHAT THEY COULD AND FOUND THAT THEY HAD EMERGED IN A LARGE VALLEY SURROUNDED BY IMPASSIBLE WALLS.
"AND THERE THEY STAYED AS DID THEIR CHILDREN. NOW I, WHO WAS THE LAST CHIEFTAIN, AM ALSO THE LAST SURVIVOR.
"AND MY DAYS ARE NUMBERED."


THE LABYRINTH?
PART OF THE ORIGINAL SERIES OF CAVERNS THAT LED MY ANCESTORS HERE.
WE HAD NO FOES SO WE CREATED OUR OWN. WE BUILT THE MAZE TO TEST OUR PROWESS. TO BECOME WARRIORS.
IN THE END, I HOPED TO USE THE LABYRINTH TO TRAP A GOD!
FOR THE TEMPER OF THOR IS LEGENDARY AND I THOUGHT THAT IF I COULD PROVOKE HIM AND SO DIE IN BATTLE...
...AVOIDING THE "STRAW DEATH" IN BED THAT SENDS MEN DOWN TO HEL...


...AND PERHAPS WINNING THROUGH TO VALHALLA.
I SEE NOW THAT I ASKED TOO MUCH. WERE I FATED TO DIE IN BATTLE, I WOULD HAVE DIED LONG AGO...
...FIGHTING AGAINST DEATH WITH THE FEARLESSNESS OF YOUTH...
I HAVE LIVED TO SEE THE MIGHTY THOR HIMSELF. I WILL DIE IN BED AND BE CONTENT.
...NOT BETRAYED TO IT BY AGE.

NO, GRANDFATHER! YOU SHALL NOT! DO YOU STILL THINK THAT YOUR FATE RESTS WITHIN YOURSELF?
THAT I HAVE COME ALL THIS WAY TO DISCOVER A DOTARD SEEKING VALHALLA THROUGH DECEPTION?
YOU HAVE CALLED UPON THE GODS OF THE ICY NORTH AND THEY HAVE ANSWERED YOU!
NOW, YOUR LIFE... IS MINE!

NEXT: IF I SHOULD DIE BEFORE I WAKE...

THOR! EILIF! LORELEI! FAFNIR! ODIN! DOOM! RAVENS? AND EVERYTHING ELSE WE CAN FIT INTO A SINGLE ISSUE!
(OF COURSE, IT WILL ALL BE VERY, VERY TINY.)

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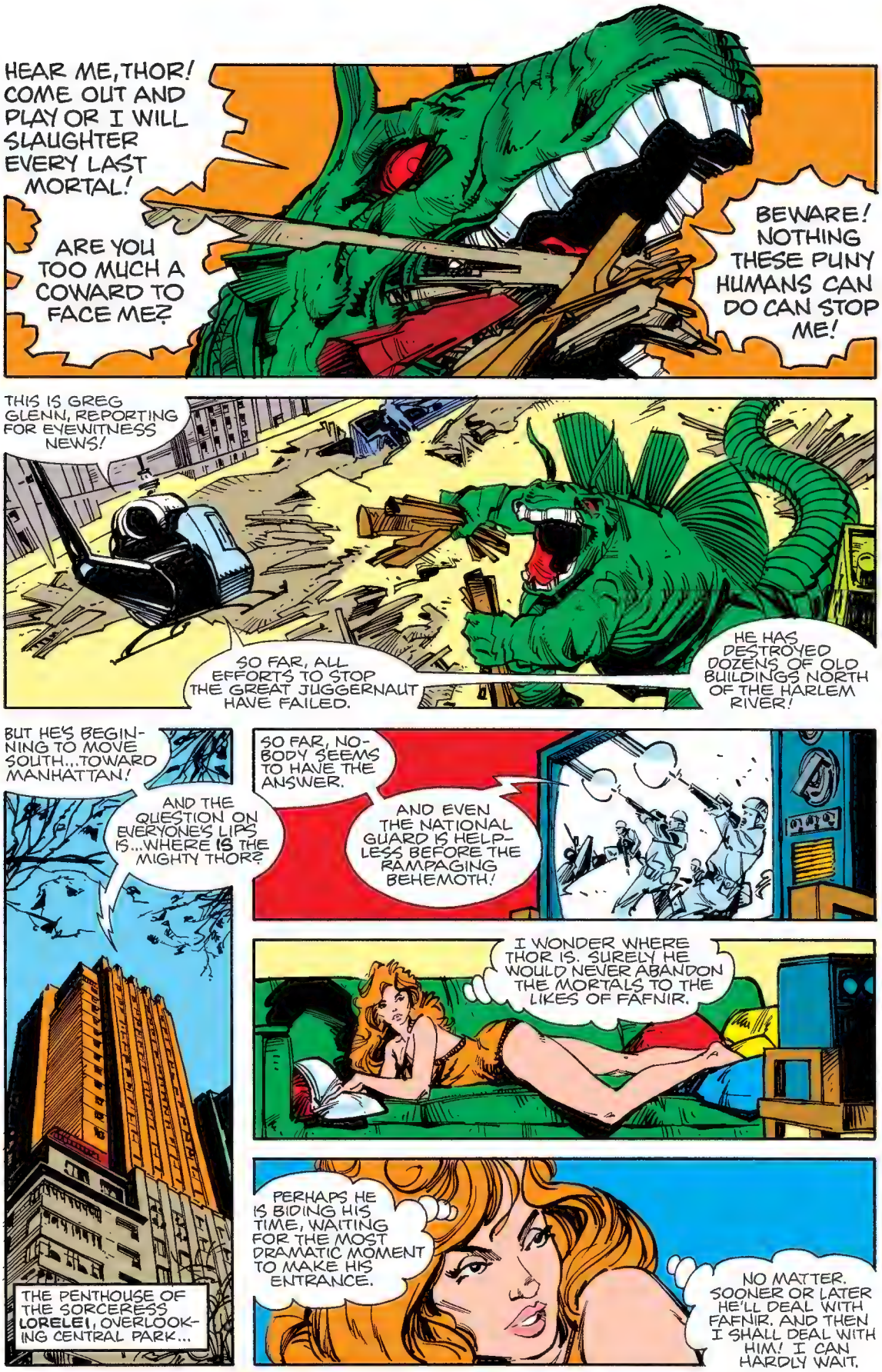
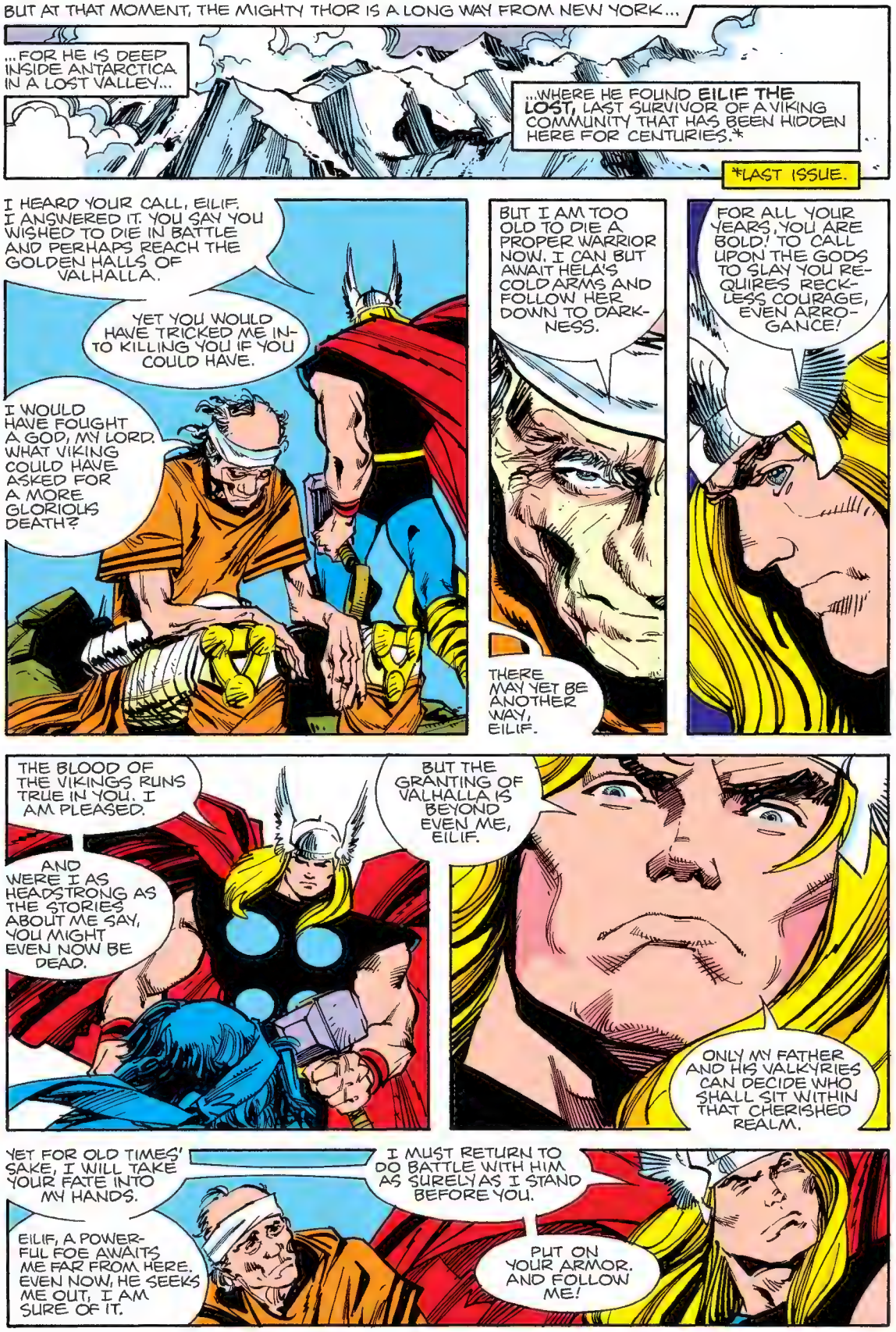
02450
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
the mighty
THOR®
the hand of
DEATH!

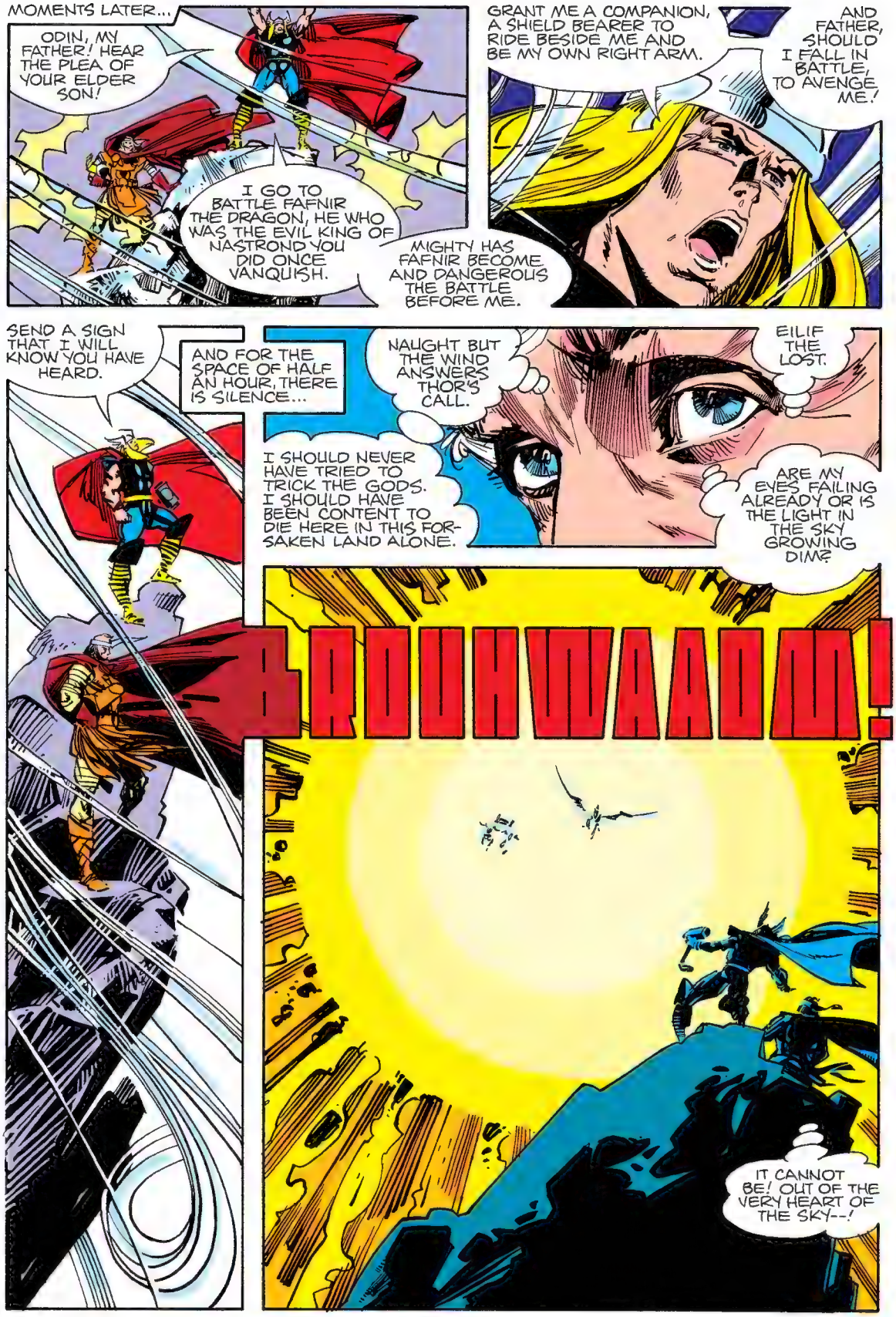
STAN LEE PRESENTS: the MIGHTY THOR®

IF I SHOULD DIE BEFORE I WAKE...!
NEW YORK CITY! THE SOUTH BRONX!
MUCH OF THIS PART OF TOWN IS A WASTELAND OF EMPTY TENEMENTS AND VACANT LOTS! IT HAS SEEN NEARLY EVERYTHING!
BUT NEVER HAS IT SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THE FURY AND DESTRUCTIVE RAGE OF THE DRAGON FAFNIR, WHO TEARS APART THE ABANDONED STRUCTURES IN A FURIOUS SEARCH FOR...THE MIGHTY THOR!
BRING ME THE SON OF ACCURSED ODIN, OR I SHALL DESTROY THIS ENTIRE CITY!

ART AND STORY: WALTER SIMONSON · LETTERING: JOHN WORKMAN, JR. · COLORS: CHRISTIE SCHEELE
EDITING: MARK GRUENWALD · EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: JIM SHOOTER


HEAR ME, THOR! COME OUT AND PLAY OR I WILL SLAUGHTER EVERY LAST MORTAL!
ARE YOU TOO MUCH A COWARD TO FACE ME?
BEWARE! NOTHING THESE PUNY HUMANS CAN DO CAN STOP ME!
THIS IS GREG GLENN, REPORTING FOR EYEWITNESS NEWS!
SO FAR, ALL EFFORTS TO STOP THE GREAT JUGGERNAUT HAVE FAILED.
HE HAS DESTROYED DOZENS OF OLD BUILDINGS NORTH OF THE HARLEM RIVER!
BUT HE'S BEGINNING TO MOVE SOUTH...TOWARD MANHATTAN!
AND THE QUESTION ON EVERYONE'S LIPS IS...WHERE IS THE MIGHTY THOR?
THE PENTHOUSE OF THE SORCERESS LORELEI, OVERLOOKING CENTRAL PARK...
SO FAR, NOBODY SEEMS TO HAVE THE ANSWER.
AND EVEN THE NATIONAL GUARD IS HELPLESS BEFORE THE RAMPAGING BEHEMOTH!
I WONDER WHERE THOR IS. SURELY HE WOULD NEVER ABANDON THE MORTALS TO THE LIKES OF FAFNIR.
PERHAPS HE IS BIDING HIS TIME, WAITING FOR THE MOST DRAMATIC MOMENT TO MAKE HIS ENTRANCE.
NO MATTER. SOONER OR LATER HE'LL DEAL WITH FAFNIR. AND THEN I SHALL DEAL WITH HIM! I CAN HARDLY WAIT.

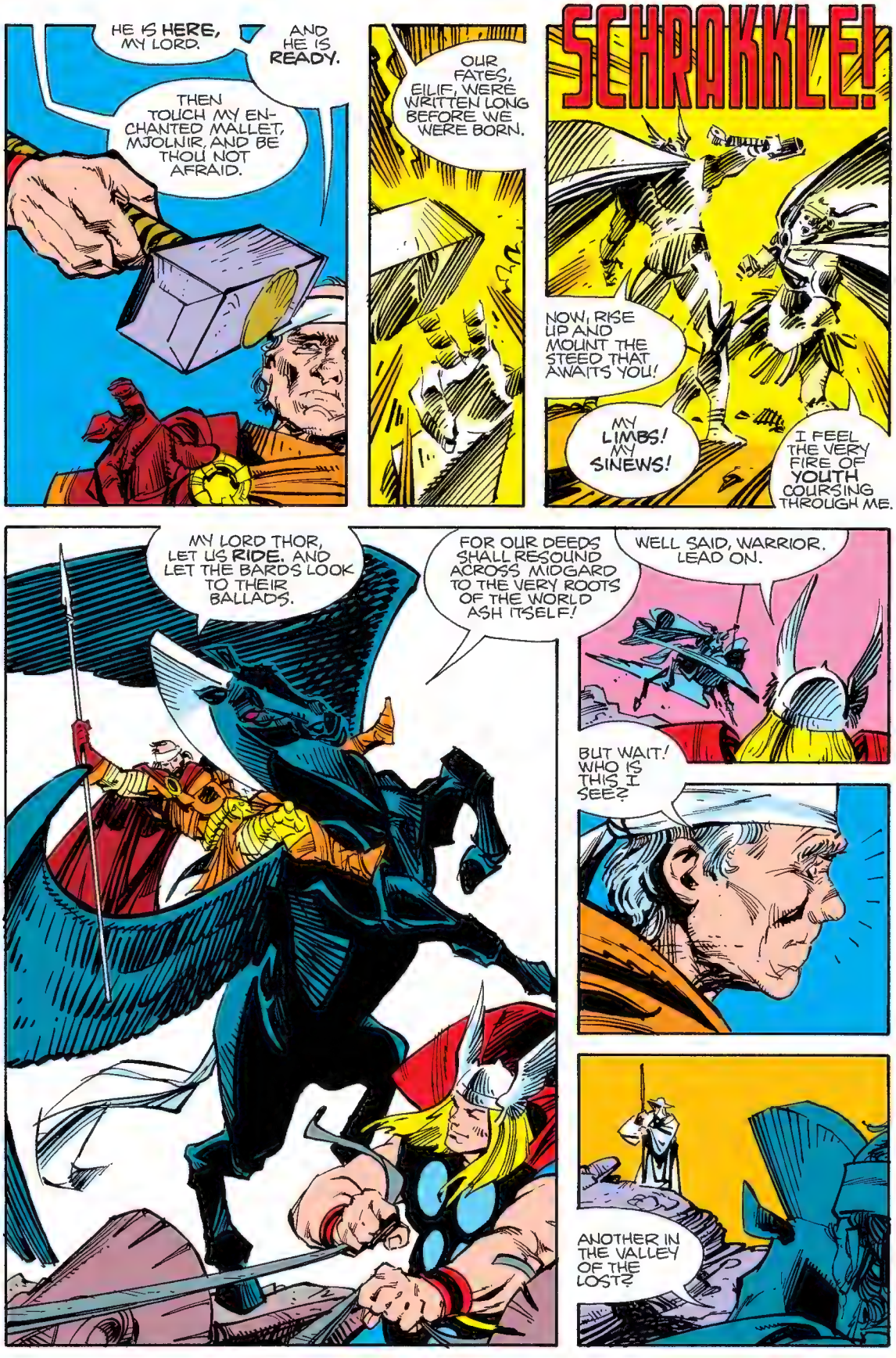

BUT AT THAT MOMENT, THE MIGHTY THOR IS A LONG WAY FROM NEW YORK...
...FOR HE IS DEEP INSIDE ANTARCTICA IN A LOST VALLEY...
...WHERE HE FOUND EILIF THE LOST, LAST SURVIVOR OF A VIKING COMMUNITY THAT HAS BEEN HIDDEN HERE FOR CENTURIES.*
*LAST ISSUE.
I HEARD YOUR CALL, EILIF. I ANSWERED IT. YOU SAY YOU WISHED TO DIE IN BATTLE AND PERHAPS REACH THE GOLDEN HALLS OF VALHALLA.
YET YOU WOULD HAVE TRICKED ME INTO KILLING YOU IF YOU COULD HAVE.
I WOULD HAVE FOUGHT A GOD, MY LORD. WHAT VIKING COULD HAVE ASKED FOR A MORE GLORIOUS DEATH?
BUT I AM TOO OLD TO DIE A PROPER WARRIOR NOW. I CAN BUT AWAIT HELA'S COLD ARMS AND FOLLOW HER DOWN TO DARKNESS.
THERE MAY YET BE ANOTHER WAY, EILIF.
FOR ALL YOUR YEARS, YOU ARE BOLD! TO CALL UPON THE GODS TO SLAY YOU REQUIRES RECKLESS COURAGE, EVEN ARROGANCE!
THE BLOOD OF THE VIKINGS RUNS TRUE IN YOU. I AM PLEASED.
AND WERE I AS HEADSTRONG AS THE STORIES ABOUT ME SAY, YOU MIGHT EVEN NOW BE DEAD.
BUT THE GRANTING OF VALHALLA IS BEYOND EVEN ME, EILIF.
ONLY MY FATHER AND HIS VALKYRIES CAN DECIDE WHO SHALL SIT WITHIN THAT CHERISHED REALM.
YET FOR OLD TIMES' SAKE, I WILL TAKE YOUR FATE INTO MY HANDS.
EILIF, A POWERFUL FOE AWAITS ME FAR FROM HERE. EVEN NOW, HE SEEKS ME OUT, I AM SURE OF IT.
I MUST RETURN TO DO BATTLE WITH HIM AS SURELY AS I STAND BEFORE YOU.
PUT ON YOUR ARMOR. AND FOLLOW ME!

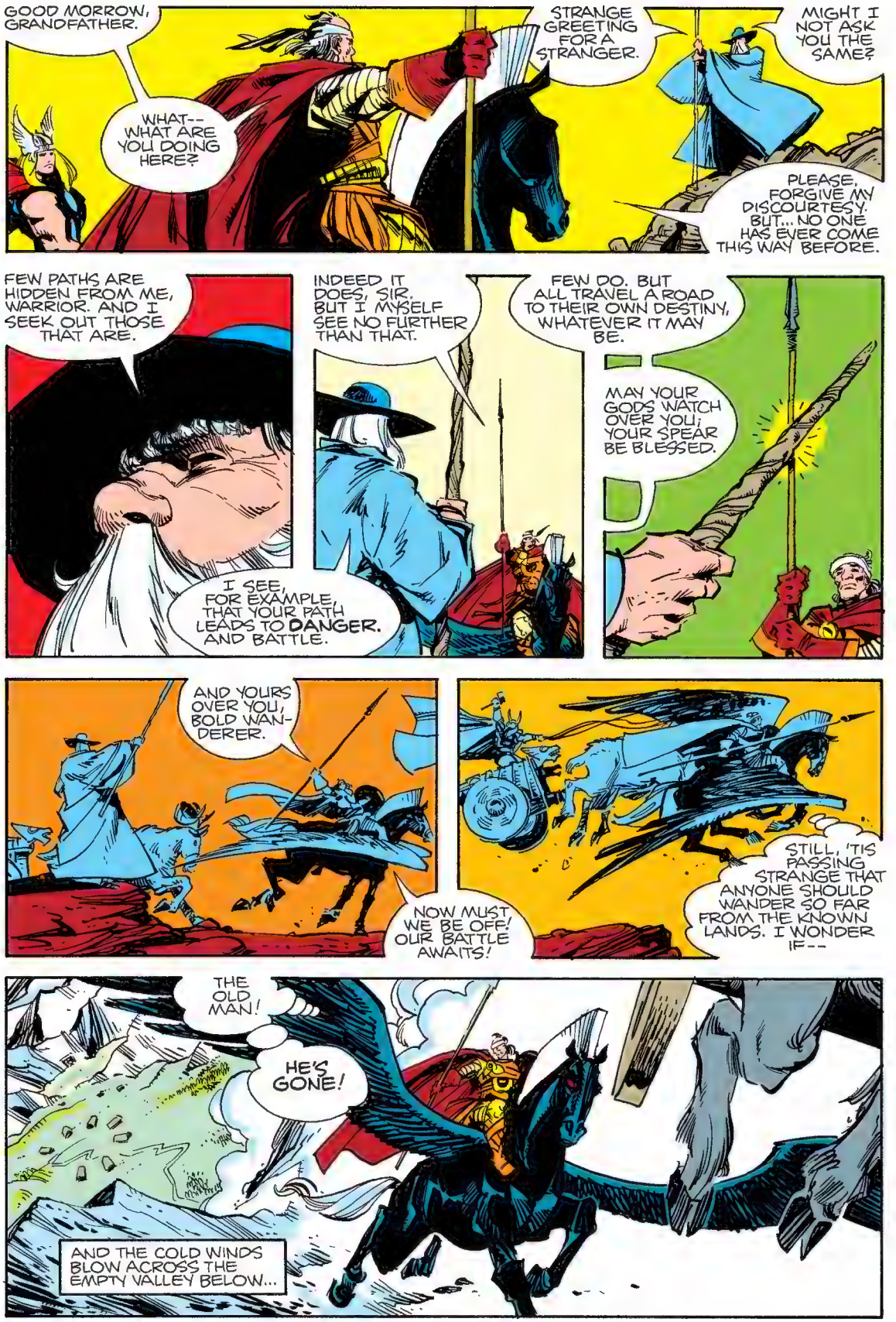

MOMENTS LATER...
ODIN, MY FATHER! HEAR THE PLEA OF YOUR ELDER SON!
I GO TO BATTLE FAFNIR THE DRAGON, HE WHO WAS THE EVIL KING OF NASTROND YOU DID ONCE VANQUISH.
MIGHTY HAS FAFNIR BECOME AND DANGEROUS THE BATTLE BEFORE ME.
GRANT ME A COMPANION, A SHIELD BEARER TO RIDE BESIDE ME AND BE MY OWN RIGHT ARM.
AND FATHER, SHOULD I FALL IN BATTLE, TO AVENGE ME!
SEND A SIGN THAT I WILL KNOW YOU HAVE HEARD.
AND FOR THE SPACE OF HALF AN HOUR, THERE IS SILENCE...
NAUGHT BUT THE WIND ANSWERS THOR'S CALL.
EILIF THE LOST.
I SHOULD NEVER HAVE TRIED TO TRICK THE GODS. I SHOULD HAVE BEEN CONTENT TO DIE HERE IN THIS FORSAKEN LAND ALONE.
ARE MY EYES FAILING ALREADY OR IS THE LIGHT IN THE SKY GROWING DIM?
KROUHWAADOM!
IT CANNOT BE! OUT OF THE VERY HEART OF THE SKY--!

'TIS CLOUD-RIDER! THE PROUD STEED OF THE WARRIOR VALKYRIE, SHIELD BEARER, HERSELF!
AND MY OWN CHARIOT, DRAWN BY TOOTHGNASHER AND TOOTHGRINDER!
ODIN HATH HEARD AND GRANTED MY PLEA!
EILIF, LAST OF THE VIKINGS, INTO BATTLE WE RIDE...
...TOGETHER!

BUT AS THE MIGHTY STEEDS OF THE GODS DESCEND TO EARTH...
...WE FIND UNREST IN THE MYSTIC LAND OF KARNILLA, QUEEN OF THE NORNS...
MY MISTRESS IS UNUSUALLY QUIET THIS EVENING. PERHAPS OUR GUEST TROUBLES HER THOUGHTS AS SHE WOULD LIKE TO TROUBLE HIS.
HE BARELY ACKNOWLEDGES MY PRESENCE, HAAG. HE LOOKS ABOUT HIM AND SEES ONLY DEATH.
I HAVE PUT HIM IN THE CHAMBER NEXT TO YOUR OWN AS YOU ORDERED, MILADY.
LOKI DID THIS TO HIM AND WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT, HE WILL PAY FOR EVERY SMILE BALDER NO LONGER WEARS.
HOW HE SHALL PAY!
MY LADY WOULD FORGET HER OLD FRIENDS ALL FOR THE SAKE OF A RUINED WARRIOR.
TSK! TSK! WHATEVER BECAME OF THE PROUD QUEEN OF THE NORNS?
PERHAPS WE'LL BE INVITING ODIN HIMSELF TO DINNER NEXT!
VENOMOUS OLD FOOL! I CARE NOT A FIG FOR ASGARD, BUT KNOW THIS.
THOSE WHO WORK MISCHIEF WITH BALDER DO SO AT THEIR PERIL!
NOW LEAVE ME.
I WANTED BALDER BECAUSE HE WAS SO PERFECT, SO FULL OF LIFE UNSPOILED BY UGLINESS.
CAN KARNILLA SOOTHE HIS TROUBLED BROW WITH GENTLENESS?
IS THE PRIZE STILL WORTH THE EFFORT?
BUT TO SEE HIM NOW. WOULD EVEN THE HEALING HAND OF A MOTHER CURE HIS ILLS?
LOKI, IF YOU HAVE COST ME THIS ONE TREASURE, MY VENGEANCE WILL BE TERRIBLE!

MEANWHILE, IN ANTARCTICA...
HE'S BEAUTI-FUL.
YES, THE STEEDS OF THE VALKYRIES ARE THE FINEST ANIMALS IN ASGARD.
LET US MOUNT AND BE AWAY. WE HAVE LITTLE TIME.
VERY WELL. I...I...
SNORT!
EILIF?
IT'S NO USE, MY LORD. YOU HAD BEST LEAVE ME BEHIND.
HOW SAY YOU?
NOW THAT THE MOMENT IS UPON ME, I SEE THAT I AM NOT WORTHY OF THIS HONOR. AND I DOUBT IF I CAN DISCHARGE SUCH A TRUST.
DO YOU NOT SEE, LORD THOR? I AM OLD! TOO OLD TO BE OF SERVICE ANY LONGER!
I CAN BARELY LIFT MY SPEAR, MUCH LESS FIGHT IN REAL COMBAT.
I FEAR NO TOWERING FOE, BUT I CAN ONLY DISHONOR MYSELF IN BATTLE. AND BE NO AID TO YOU.
WHAT WORDS ARE THESE I HEAR? WHERE IS THE WARRIOR WHO DARED TO CALL THE GODS OUT OF THE SKY?
WHOSE PEOPLE DARED THE FURIOUS ELEMENTS OF THE OCEAN IN OPEN BOATS AND LAUGHED AT THE FEAR?
WHO LIFTED HIS WEAPON AGAINST THE MIGHTIEST FIGHTER OF ASGARD?
DOES HE SEEK AN EASY DEATH? A CHEAP SEAT IN THE HALLS OF VALHALLA?
I DO NOT SPEAK TO THE OLD MAN CRINGING BEFORE ME. I SPEAK TO THE WARRIOR WHO DARED TO TEST THE METTLE OF THE MIGHTY THOR.
LET HIM ANSWER ME!


HE IS HERE, MY LORD.
AND HE IS READY.
THEN TOUCH MY ENCHANTED MALLET, MJOLNIR, AND BE THOU NOT AFRAID.
OUR FATES, EILIF, WERE WRITTEN LONG BEFORE WE WERE BORN.
SCHRAKKLE!
NOW, RISE UP AND MOUNT THE STEED THAT AWAITS YOU!
MY LIMBS! MY SINEWS!
I FEEL THE VERY FIRE OF YOUTH COURSING THROUGH ME.
MY LORD THOR, LET US RIDE, AND LET THE BARDS LOOK TO THEIR BALLADS.
FOR OUR DEEDS SHALL RESOUND ACROSS MIDGARD TO THE VERY ROOTS OF THE WORLD ASH ITSELF!
WELL SAID, WARRIOR. LEAD ON.
BUT WAIT! WHO IS THIS I SEE?
ANOTHER IN THE VALLEY OF THE LOST?

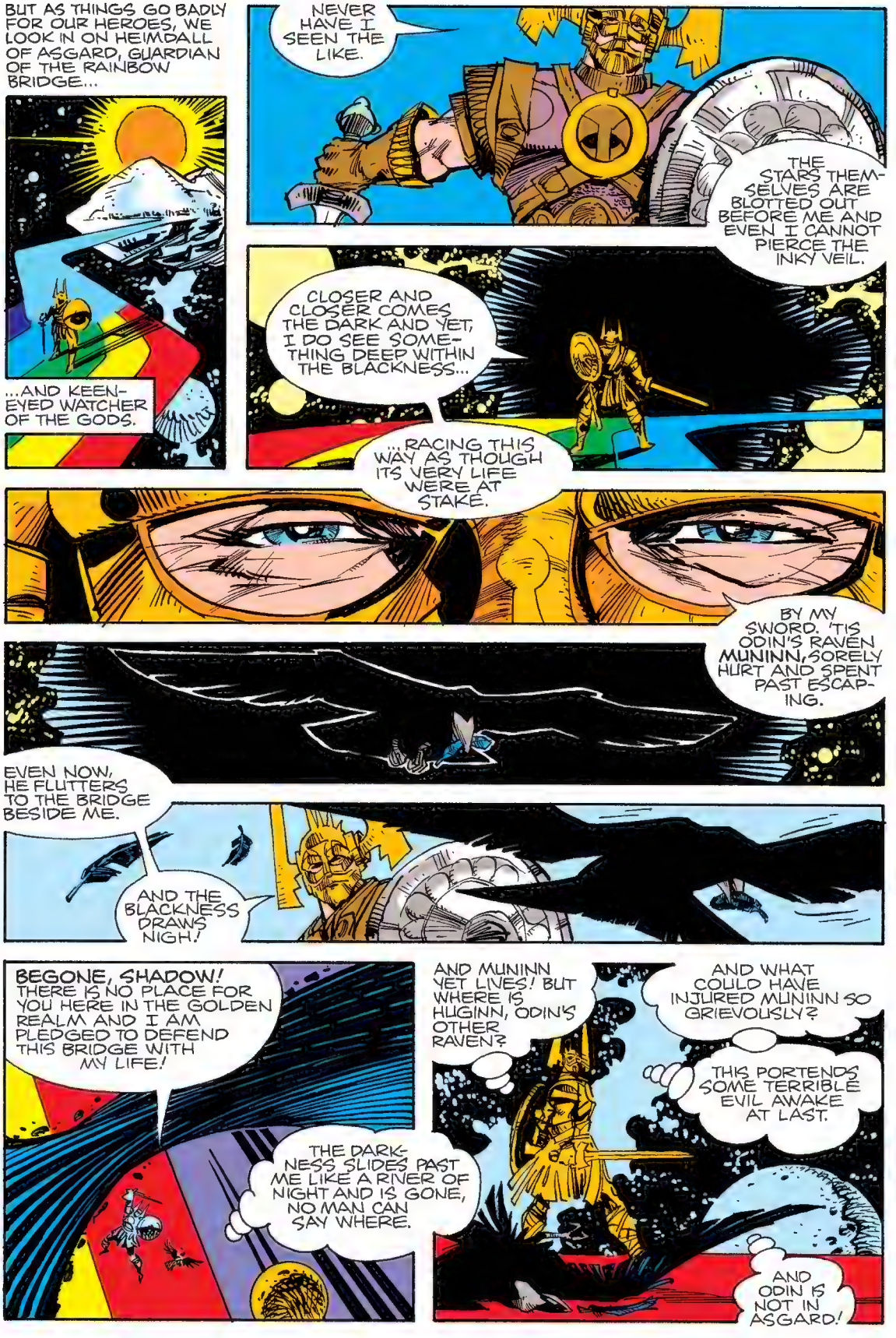

GOOD MORROW, GRANDFATHER.
WHAT-- WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
STRANGE GREETING FOR A STRANGER.
MIGHT I NOT ASK YOU THE SAME?
PLEASE, FORGIVE MY DISCOURTESY. BUT... NO ONE HAS EVER COME THIS WAY BEFORE.
FEW PATHS ARE HIDDEN FROM ME, WARRIOR. AND I SEEK OUT THOSE THAT ARE.
I SEE, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT YOUR PATH LEADS TO DANGER. AND BATTLE.
INDEED IT DOES, SIR. BUT I MYSELF SEE NO FURTHER THAN THAT.
FEW DO. BUT ALL TRAVEL A ROAD TO THEIR OWN DESTINY, WHATEVER IT MAY BE.
MAY YOUR GODS WATCH OVER YOU; YOUR SPEAR BE BLESSED.
AND YOURS OVER YOU, BOLD WANDERER.
NOW MUST WE BE OFF! OUR BATTLE AWAITS!
STILL, 'TIS PASSING STRANGE THAT ANYONE SHOULD WANDER SO FAR FROM THE KNOWN LANDS. I WONDER IF--
THE OLD MAN!
HE'S GONE!
AND THE COLD WINDS BLOW ACROSS THE EMPTY VALLEY BELOW...

ELSEWHERE, BEYOND THE FIELDS WE KNOW...
AN ENDLESS HOST CHANTS...
THE NAME...
THE NAME...
THE NAME...
THE NAME...
AND A VOICE AS OLD AS TIME REPLIES...
DOOM!
THE SWORD IS NAMED...
...AND THE NAME IS--TWILIGHT!

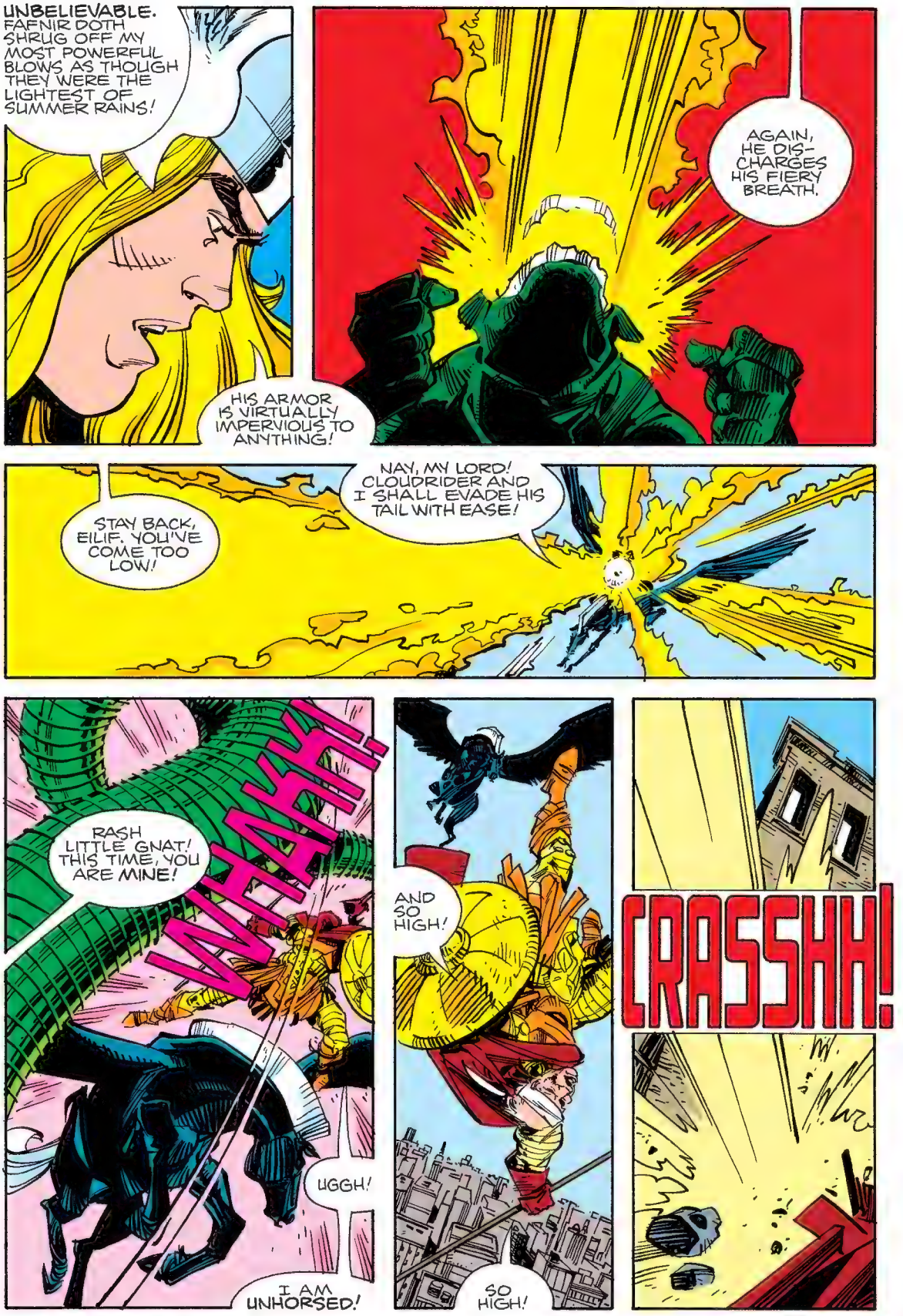
MEANWHILE, IN THE SOUTH BRONX, THINGS HAVE GOTTEN OUT OF HAND...
...AT LEAST IF YOU'RE IN THE NATIONAL GUARD.
WATCH OUT!
WAK UM!
HERE HE COMES! HIT THE DIRT!
VERY WELL, THOR.
SINCE YOU CHOOSE TO REMAIN IN COWARDLY HIDING, I SHALL COMMENCE WITH THE SERIOUS DESTRUCTION OF THIS CITY!

WE HAVE ARRIVED JUST IN TIME, MY LORD. THE DRAGON STANDS BEFORE US!
BUT THIS CITY! SURELY THERE ARE NOT SO MANY PEOPLE IN THE ENTIRE WORLD!
IF WE LIVE, EILIF, I WILL SHOW YOU A CITY THE LIKE OF WHICH YOU'VE NEVER DREAMED!
BUT NOW, OUR TASK STILL LIES BEFORE US.
LET THE BATTLE BE JOINED!
DEATH TO FAFNIR!
FOR ODIN! AND ASGARD!
KRATHH
AMMM!

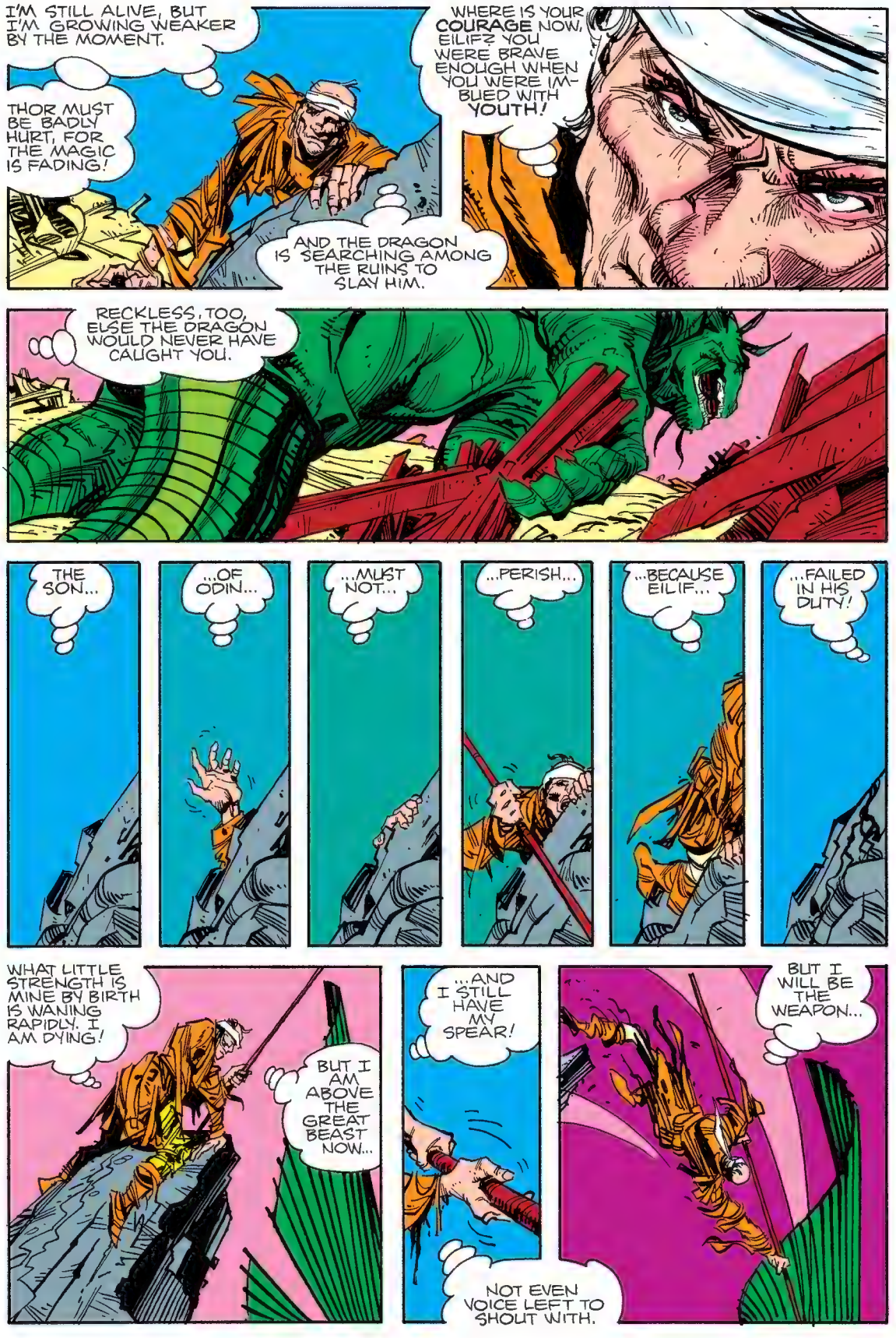
SO! THE TREACHEROUS THUNDER GOD FINALLY SHOWS HIS FACE!
YOU WERE WISE TO FEAR ME, ODINSON!
FOR MY POWER DWARFS YOUR OWN AND THOUGH YOU HAVE SOUGHT ME OUT, ALL YOU HAVE FOUND IS YOUR OWN DESTRUCTION!
HIS TAIL! MOVING FASTER THAN LIGHT-NING!
FEAR NOT, MY LORD! I SHALL NOT FAIL YOU!
BAWHAM!
THOR HAS A FRIEND, HAS HE?
THEN STAND BESIDE EACH OTHER AND I'LL SEND YOU DOWN TO HEL TOGETHER!
BEWARE, EILIF! HE SWEEPS THE SKY WITH FLAME!


BUT AS THINGS GO BADLY FOR OUR HEROES, WE LOOK IN ON HEIMDALL OF ASGARD, GUARDIAN OF THE RAINBOW BRIDGE...
...AND KEEN-EYED WATCHER OF THE GODS.
NEVER HAVE I SEEN THE LIKE.
THE STARS THEMSELVES ARE BLOTTED OUT BEFORE ME AND EVEN I CANNOT PIERCE THE INKY VEIL.
CLOSER AND CLOSER COMES THE DARK AND YET, I DO SEE SOMETHING DEEP WITHIN THE BLACKNESS...
...RACING THIS WAY AS THOUGH ITS VERY LIFE WERE AT STAKE.
BY MY SWORD. 'TIS ODIN'S RAVEN MUNINN, SORELY HURT AND SPENT PAST ESCAPING.
EVEN NOW, HE FLUTTERS TO THE BRIDGE BESIDE ME.
AND THE BLACKNESS DRAWS NIGH!
BEGONE, SHADOW! THERE IS NO PLACE FOR YOU HERE IN THE GOLDEN REALM AND I AM PLEDGED TO DEFEND THIS BRIDGE WITH MY LIFE!
THE DARKNESS SLIDES PAST ME LIKE A RIVER OF NIGHT AND IS GONE, NO MAN CAN SAY WHERE.
AND MUNINN YET LIVES! BUT WHERE IS HUGINN, ODIN'S OTHER RAVEN?
AND WHAT COULD HAVE INJURED MUNINN SO GRIEVOUSLY?
THIS PORTENDS SOME TERRIBLE EVIL AWAKE AT LAST.
AND ODIN IS NOT IN ASGARD!

WHILE ON EARTH...
CHUCK CHERKLE HERE FOR ON-THE-SPOT NEWS!
THE BATTLE ROYALE CONTINUES BETWEEN THOR AND THE MONSTER!
SO FAR, THE FIGHT HAS BEEN ABOUT EVEN, THE CREATURE'S POWER MATCHED BY THOR'S SPEED AND AGILITY!
THE POLICE AND GUARDSMEN HAVE EVACUATED THIS PART OF THE CITY AND--
UH-OH! THOR STOOD IN ONE SPOT TOO LONG AND THE MONSTER'S ABOUT TO GRAB HIM!
BACK, CREATURE OF EVIL! SEEK NOT TO TAKE WHAT YOU CANNOT HOLD!
CHARGRAKK!
ARRRGH!
AND NOW, BEFORE YOU CAN RECOVER, I SHALL STRIKE WITH ALL THE POWER OF MY ENCHANTED HAMMER!
THE FORCE OF THE BLOW IS FELT AS FAR AWAY AS PENNSYLVANIA!

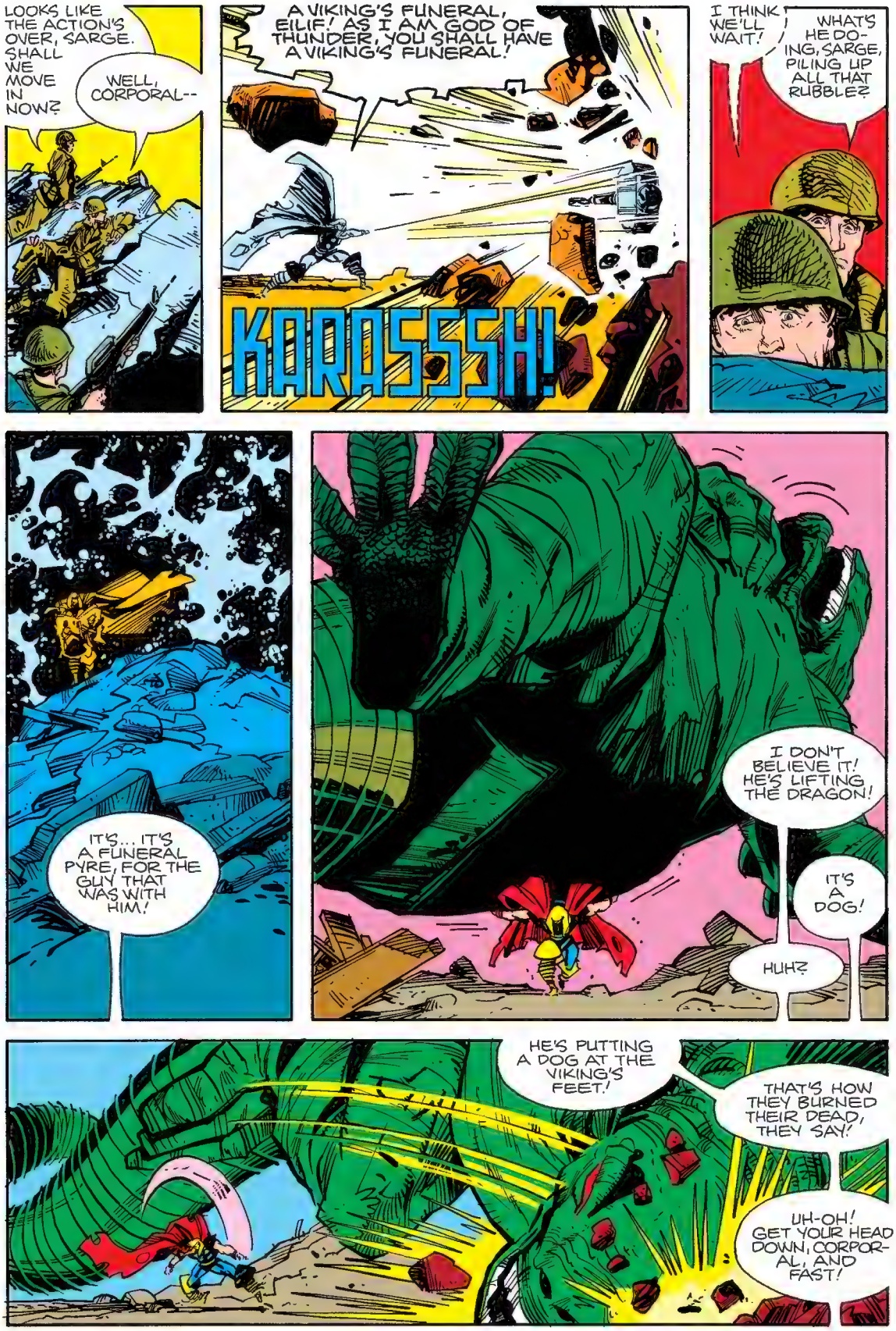

UNBELIEVABLE. FAFNIR DOTH SHRUG OFF MY MOST POWERFUL BLOWS AS THOUGH THEY WERE THE LIGHTEST OF SUMMER RAINS!
HIS ARMOR IS VIRTUALLY IMPERVIOUS TO ANYTHING!
AGAIN, HE DIS-CHARGES HIS FIERY BREATH.
STAY BACK, EILIF. YOU'VE COME TOO LOW!
NAY, MY LORD! CLOUDRIDER AND I SHALL EVADE HIS TAIL WITH EASE!
RASH LITTLE GNAT! THIS TIME, YOU ARE MINE!
WHAM!
UGGH!
I AM UNHORSED!
AND SO HIGH!
SO HIGH!
CRASSHH!

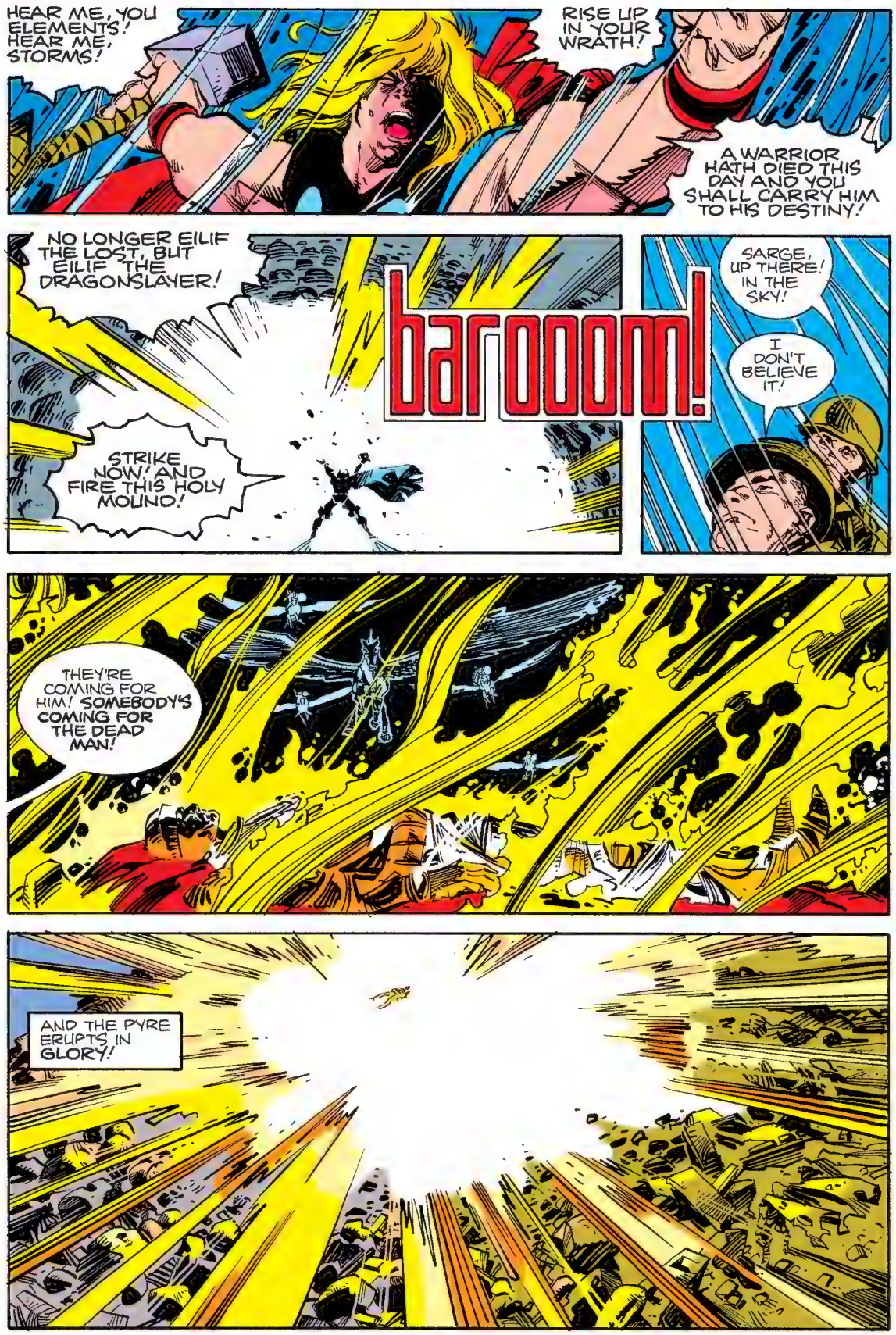
EILIF!!
WELL SAID, GODLING! I KNEW YOUR CONCERN FOR THE MORTAL WOULD UNDO YOU SOONER OR LATER!
SWISH!
THIS COULD BE IT, FOLKS! THE DRAGON'S REALLY LAYING INTO THOR NOW!
AND WITH-OUT HIS CHARIOT, THOR CAN'T GET CLEAR!
KLAPTT WHOOOM!
UH, FOLKS, WE'RE GOING TO RETURN YOU TO THE STUDIO NOW SO THAT WE CAN... RELOCATE... OUR REMOTE FACILITIES AT A... A... BETTER VANTAGE POINT!
WE'LL BE BACK WITH YOU AS SOON AS WE CAN!
LET'S GET THE HECK OUT OF HERE, CLANCY!


I'M STILL ALIVE, BUT I'M GROWING WEAKER BY THE MOMENT.
THOR MUST BE BADLY HURT, FOR THE MAGIC IS FADING!
AND THE DRAGON IS SEARCHING AMONG THE RUINS TO SLAY HIM.
WHERE IS YOUR COURAGE NOW, EILIF? YOU WERE BRAVE ENOUGH WHEN YOU WERE IMBUED WITH YOUTH!
RECKLESS, TOO, ELSE THE DRAGON WOULD NEVER HAVE CAUGHT YOU.
THE SON...
...OF ODIN...
...MUST NOT...
...PERISH...
...BECAUSE EILIF...
...FAILED IN HIS DUTY!
WHAT LITTLE STRENGTH IS MINE BY BIRTH IS WANING RAPIDLY. I AM DYING!
BUT I AM ABOVE THE GREAT BEAST NOW...
...AND I STILL HAVE MY SPEAR!
NOT EVEN VOICE LEFT TO SHOUT WITH.
BUT I WILL BE THE WEAPON...

...FOR ODIN, FOR THOR, AND ASGARD!
ARRROOOO!
WHO HAS DARED TO WOUND ME?
ACCURSED MORTAL! THOR CAN WAIT! ONLY YOUR DEATH WILL SATISFY ME NOW!
WHILE UNDER THE RUBBLE...
EILIF'S SPEAR! IT HATH PIERCED FAFNIR'S IMPENETRABLE HIDE!
I MUST GATHER MY REMAINING ENERGIES AND FLY!
FOR EILIF HATH SHOWED ME THE WAY AND WHAT I COULD NOT DO ALONE...
...MAY YET BE ACCOMPLISHED! EILIF'S WEAPON SHALL BE THE DRAGON'S BANE!
NOW BY ALL THE STRENGTH OF MY HERITAGE, BY THE POWER OF MJOLNIR, LET EVIL PERISH!

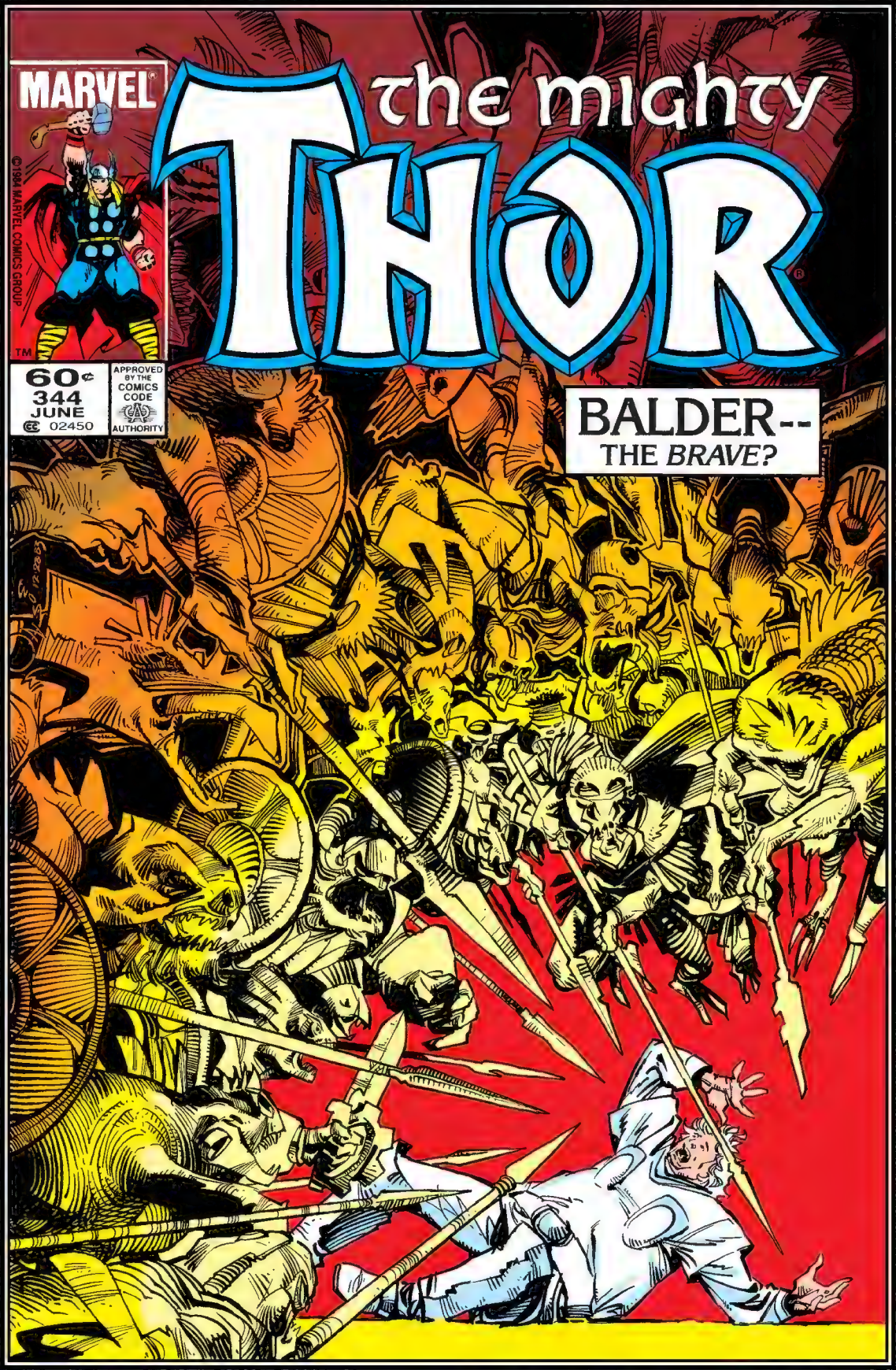
AAAHHHEEE!
'TIS DONE! THE SPEAR HATH BEEN DRIVEN INTO THE BEAST FULL FORCE!
AND HE BEGINS TO TOPPLE!
THE DRAGON'S FIRE...
BOOOOM!
...IS QUENCHED!
BUT WHAT OF VALIANT EILIF?
EILIF! EILIF!
HAS THE LIFE FLED YOUR SHATTERED BODY?
CAN YOU NO LONGER HEAR EVEN THE VOICES OF THE GODS?
A TRUER COMPANION HATH NO MORTAL BEEN TO ME!
OH, EILIF, MY SHIELD BEARER EILIF!


LOOKS LIKE THE ACTION'S OVER, SARGE. SHALL WE MOVE IN NOW?
WELL, CORPORAL--
A VIKING'S FUNERAL, EILIF! AS I AM GOD OF THUNDER, YOU SHALL HAVE A VIKING'S FUNERAL!
KARASSSH!
I THINK WE'LL WAIT!
WHAT'S HE DOING, SARGE, PILING UP ALL THAT RUBBLE?
IT'S... IT'S A FUNERAL PYRE, FOR THE GUY THAT WAS WITH HIM!
I DON'T BELIEVE IT! HE'S LIFTING THE DRAGON!
IT'S A DOG!
HUH?
HE'S PUTTING A DOG AT THE VIKING'S FEET!
THAT'S HOW THEY BURNED THEIR DEAD, THEY SAY!
UH-OH! GET YOUR HEAD DOWN, CORPORAL, AND FAST!


HEAR ME, YOU ELEMENTS! HEAR ME, STORMS!
RISE UP IN YOUR WRATH!
A WARRIOR HATH DIED THIS DAY AND YOU SHALL CARRY HIM TO HIS DESTINY!
NO LONGER EILIF THE LOST, BUT EILIF THE DRAGONSLAYER!
baroooom!
STRIKE NOW! AND FIRE THIS HOLY MOUND!
SARGE, UP THERE! IN THE SKY!
I DON'T BELIEVE IT!
THEY'RE COMING FOR HIM! SOMEBODY'S COMING FOR THE DEAD MAN!
AND THE PYRE ERUPTS IN GLORY!

FOR A MOMENT, THE ENTIRE CITY LIES STUNNED BY THE BLINDING LIGHT!
BUT ONLY A FEW SEE MORE THAN THE PLAY OF LIGHTNING AND THE DANCING SHADOWS!
AND NONE SEE THE LOOMING FIGURE THAT TOWERS OVER ALL, AS FATHER ODIN AND HIS VALKYRIE MAIDENS WELCOME THE LAST VIKING...
KATHOOM!
...INTO VALHALLA!
AS THE WILD RIDERS DISAPPEAR INTO THE NIGHT...
LET'S GO HOME, CORPORAL. NOTHING MORE WE CAN DO HERE.

WITH THE DRIZZLY MORNING, THE PALL OF SMOKE OVER THE SOUTH BRONX BEGINS TO DISPERSE...
WHILE IN BROOKLYN, IN A SMALL APARTMENT IN BAY RIDGE...
AFTER LAST NIGHT, I SHOULD BE JOYFUL. AND YET, I FIND MYSELF WEARY OF SPIRIT.
FOR THOUGH THE VICTORY WAS OURS, EILIF IS GONE AND THIS ROOM, THIS VERY EARTH, SEEMS THE MEANER FOR IT.
PERHAPS I SHOULD HAVE STAYED IN THE AVENGERS MANSION AFTER ALL, AMONG FAMILIAR SURROUNDINGS.
OR NOT GIVEN UP MY DONALD BLAKE IDENTITY. HE AT LEAST HAD A HOME AND FRIENDS.
AND SIF IS GONE AS WELL.
THOUGH SHE IS BETTER OFF QUESTING ACROSS THE UNIVERSE WITH BETA RAY BILL, YET NOW I FIND I MISS HER TOUCH.
NOK! NOK!
EH?
WHY, IT'S... I NEVER DID KNOW YOUR NAME.
MELODI. JERRY TOLD ME WHERE TO FIND YOU.
MOVING INTO NEW SURROUNDINGS IS ALWAYS SO DEPRESSING, DON'T YOU THINK?
AND I DID SAY I WANTED TO THANK YOU FOR SAVING MY LIFE.
SEE? I BROUGHT ALONG SOMETHING SPECIAL TO DRINK TO CELEBRATE.
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
WHAT? OH, I WAS JUST... IN A FIGHT. NOTHING SERIOUS.
I KNOW WHAT YOU NEED. A GOOD BACKRUB WILL TAKE ALL THOSE NASTY KINKS RIGHT OUT.
click
WHY DON'T YOU TAKE OFF YOUR SHIRT?
NEXT: WHATEVER HAPPENED TO
BALDER THE BRAVE?
ALONG WITH OTHER GREAT STUFF!


MARVEL
the mighty
THOR
BALDER--
THE BRAVE?
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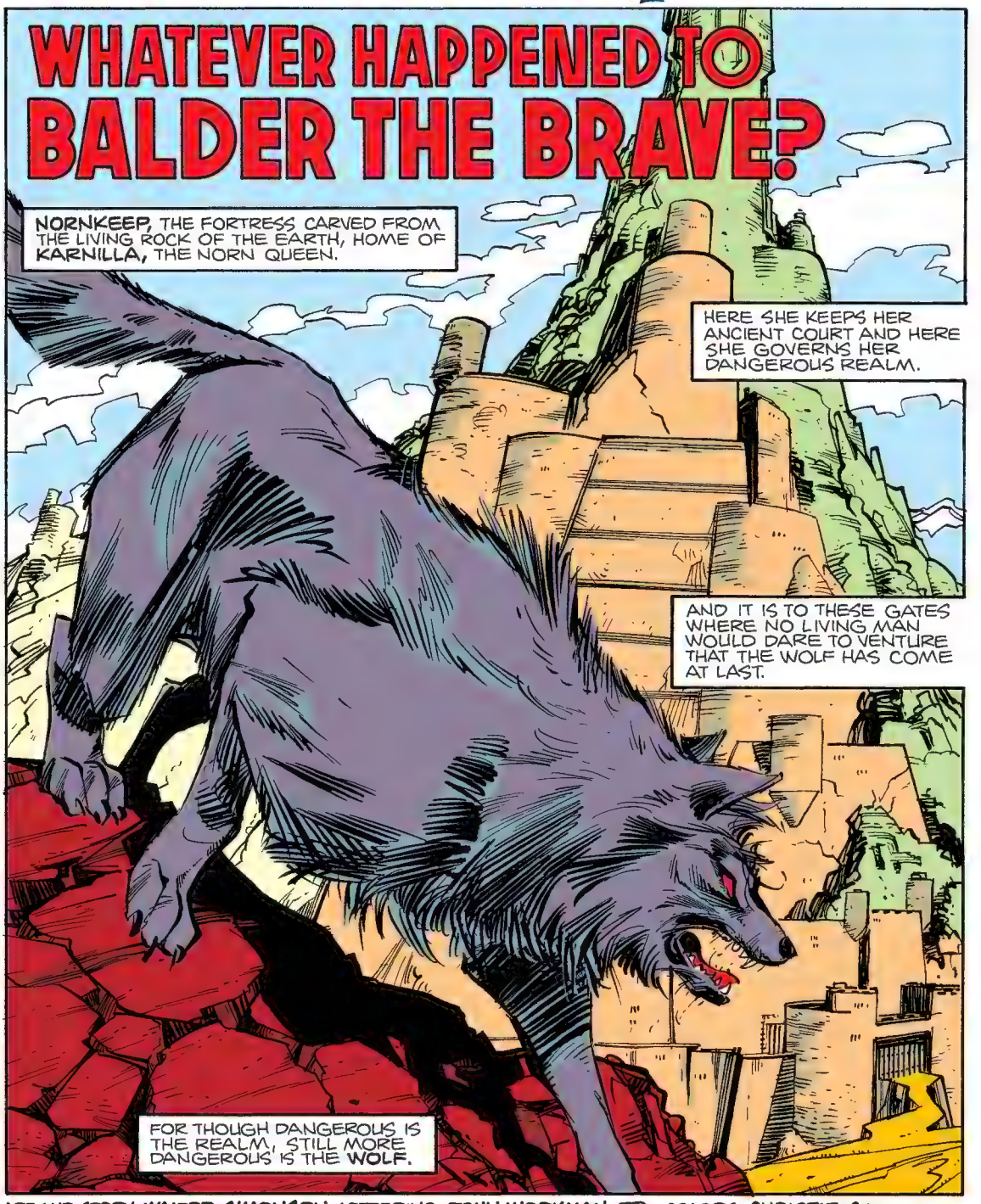
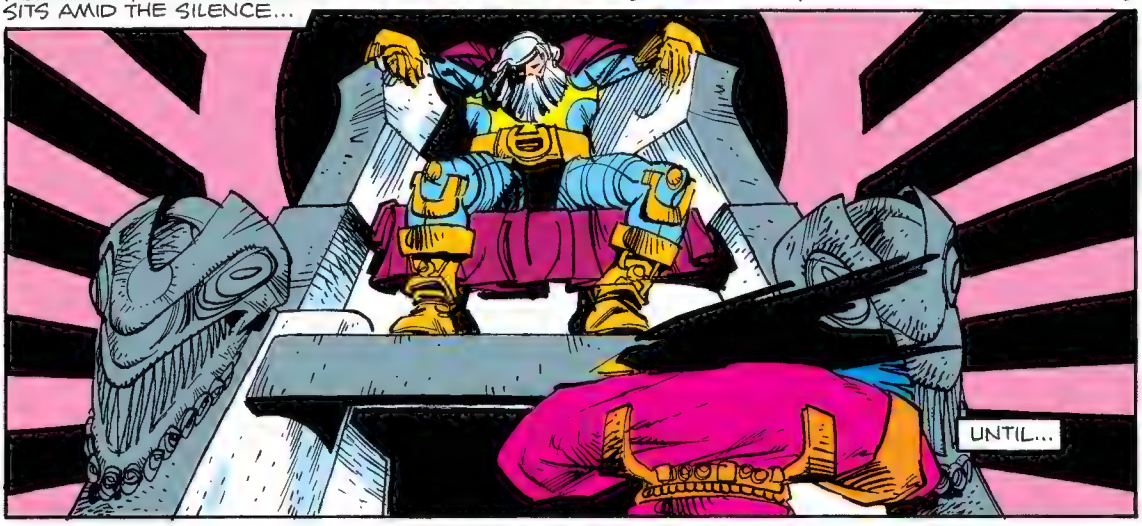
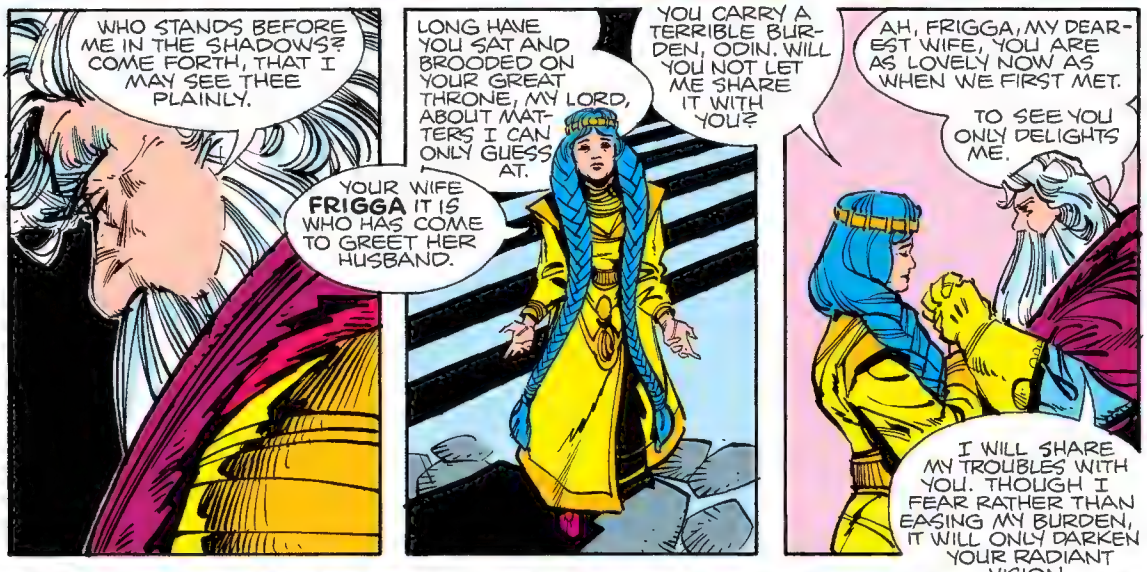

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO BALDER THE BRAVE?
NORNKEEP, THE FORTRESS CARVED FROM THE LIVING ROCK OF THE EARTH, HOME OF KARNILLA, THE NORN QUEEN.
HERE SHE KEEPS HER ANCIENT COURT AND HERE SHE GOVERNS HER DANGEROUS REALM.
AND IT IS TO THESE GATES WHERE NO LIVING MAN WOULD DARE TO VENTURE THAT THE WOLF HAS COME AT LAST.
FOR THOUGH DANGEROUS IS THE REALM, STILL MORE DANGEROUS IS THE WOLF.

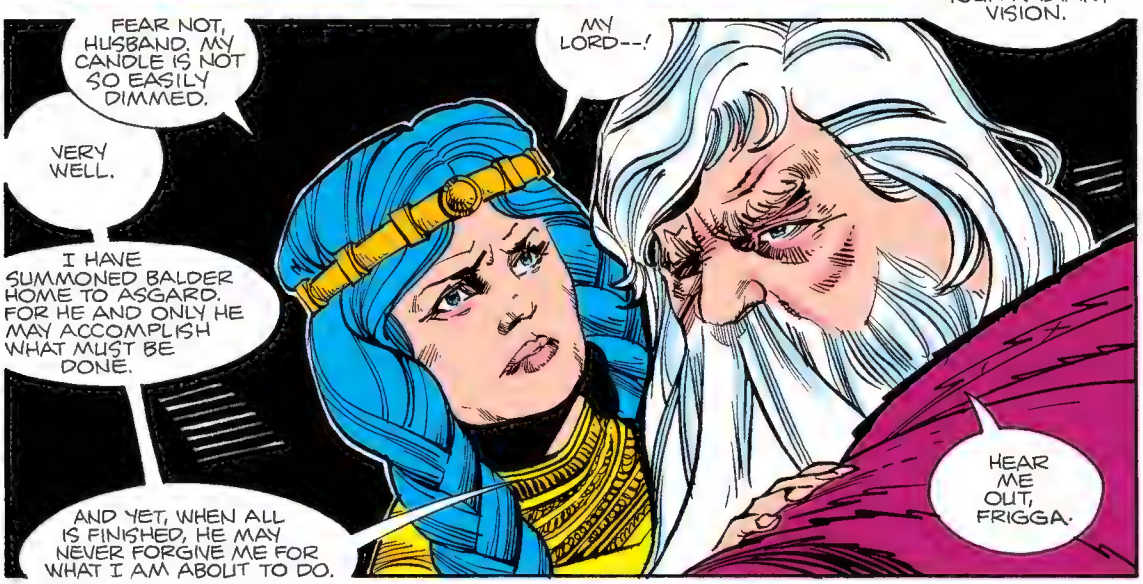
ART AND STORY: WALTER SIMONSON · LETTERING: JOHN WORKMAN, JR. · COLORS: CHRISTIE SCHEELE
EDITING: MARK GRUENWALD · EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: JIM SHOOTER

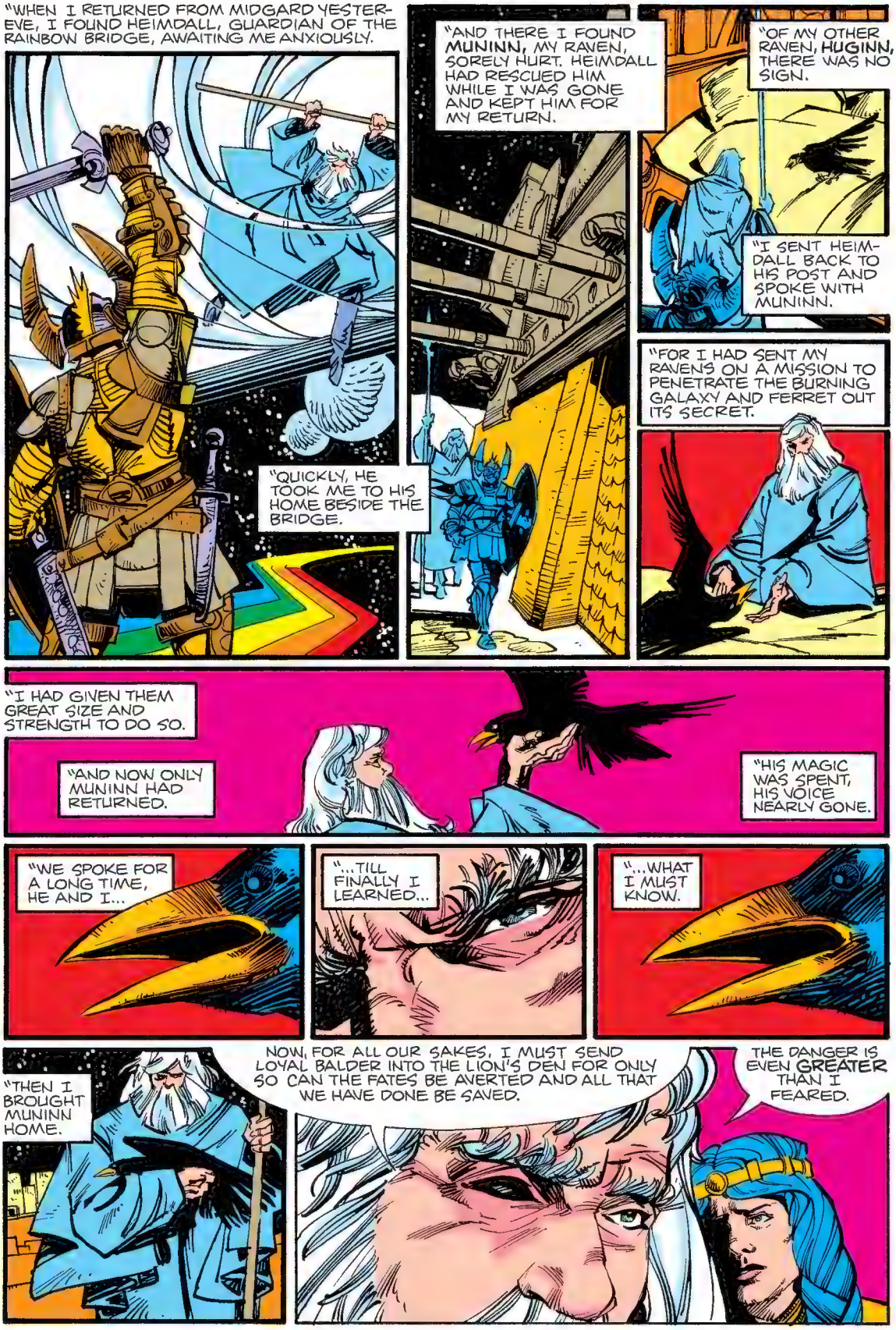
GUARDSMAN! WHAT'S THIS? I GAVE NO ORDER THAT THE PORTCULLIS SHOULD BE RAISED!
WHAT? LOOK YONDER! A FELL BEAST! TO ARMS!
CAPTAIN, I SWEAR TO YOU--!
STAY BACK, YOU FOOLS! DO YOU NOT RECOGNIZE HIM? 'TIS GERI, ONE OF ODIN'S WOLVES.
HINDER HIM ON PERIL OF YOUR LIFE! HE COMES AS A MESSENGER FROM ASGARD!
MILADY! BEWARE! YOUR ENEMIES SEEK TO DESTROY US!
HOW DARE YOU ENTER THIS THRONE ROOM? DEPART LEST I SUMMON THE HOSTS OF HEL TO DRAG YOU DOWN TO DOOM!
SAVE YOUR SPELLS, O QUEEN, FOR THEY WOULD AVAIL YOU NAUGHT.
THE CHILDREN OF ODIN TRAVEL UNDER HIS PROTECTION AND ARE SENT TO SUMMON THOSE THE ALL-FATHER WISHES TO ASGARD.
AS GERI HAS BEEN SENT TO SUMMON ME.
AND THOUGH I HAD HOPED TO LOSE MYSELF FOREVER, I CANNOT DISOBEY MY LIEGE.
FAITHFUL GERI, I WILL COME WITH YOU.

MEANWHILE, IN THE DARKENED THRONE ROOM OF ODIN'S GREAT HALL, THE RULER OF NORSE GODS SITS AMID THE SILENCE...

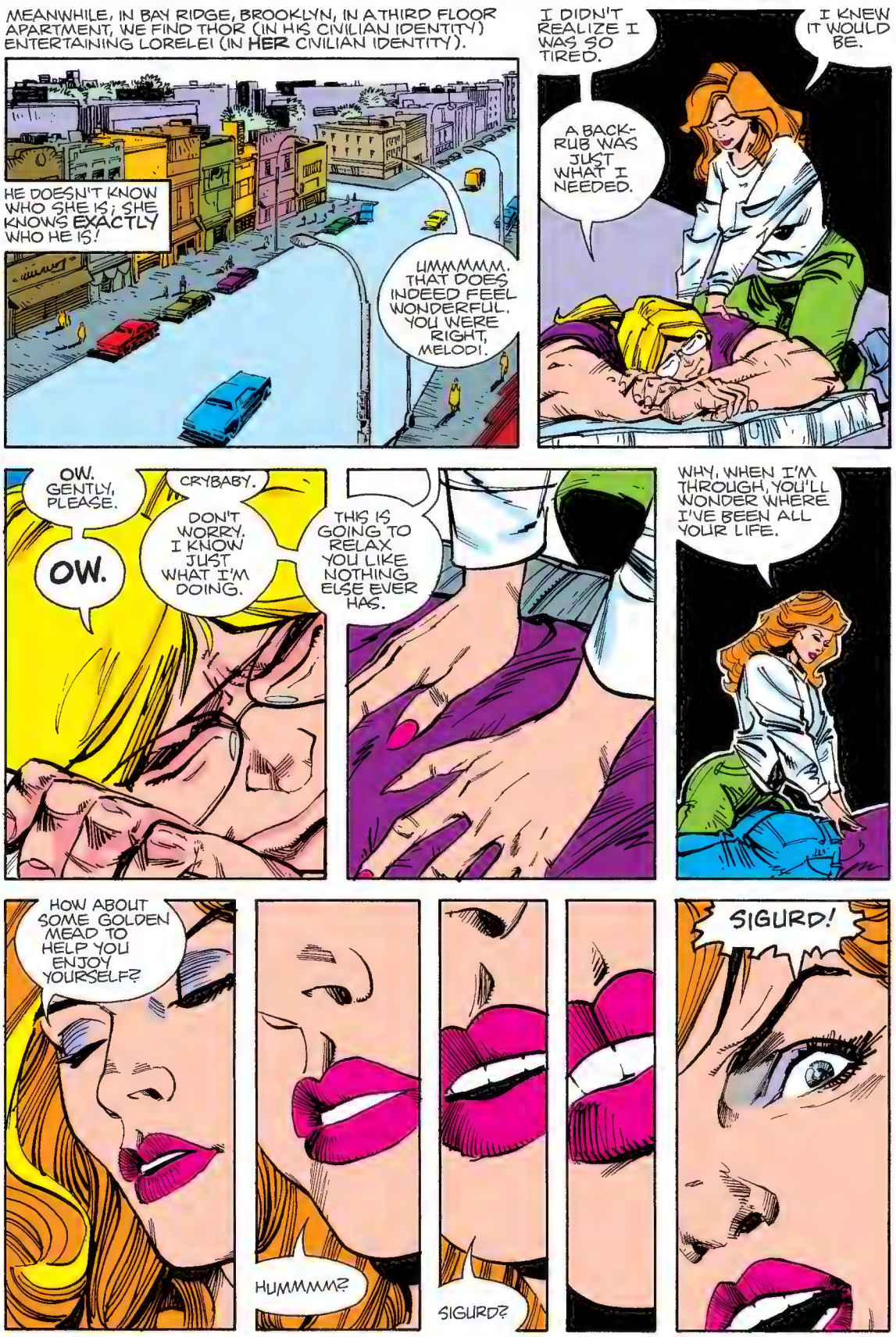



WHO STANDS BEFORE ME IN THE SHADOWS? COME FORTH, THAT I MAY SEE THEE PLAINLY.
YOUR WIFE **FRIGGA** IT IS WHO HAS COME TO GREET HER HUSBAND.
LONG HAVE YOU SAT AND BROODED ON YOUR GREAT THRONE, MY LORD, ABOUT MATTERS I CAN ONLY GUESS AT.
YOU CARRY A TERRIBLE BURDEN, ODIN. WILL YOU NOT LET ME SHARE IT WITH YOU?
AH, FRIGGA, MY DEAREST WIFE, YOU ARE AS LOVELY NOW AS WHEN WE FIRST MET.
TO SEE YOU ONLY DELIGHTS ME.
I WILL SHARE MY TROUBLES WITH YOU. THOUGH I FEAR RATHER THAN EASING MY BURDEN, IT WILL ONLY DARKEN YOUR RADIANT VISION.

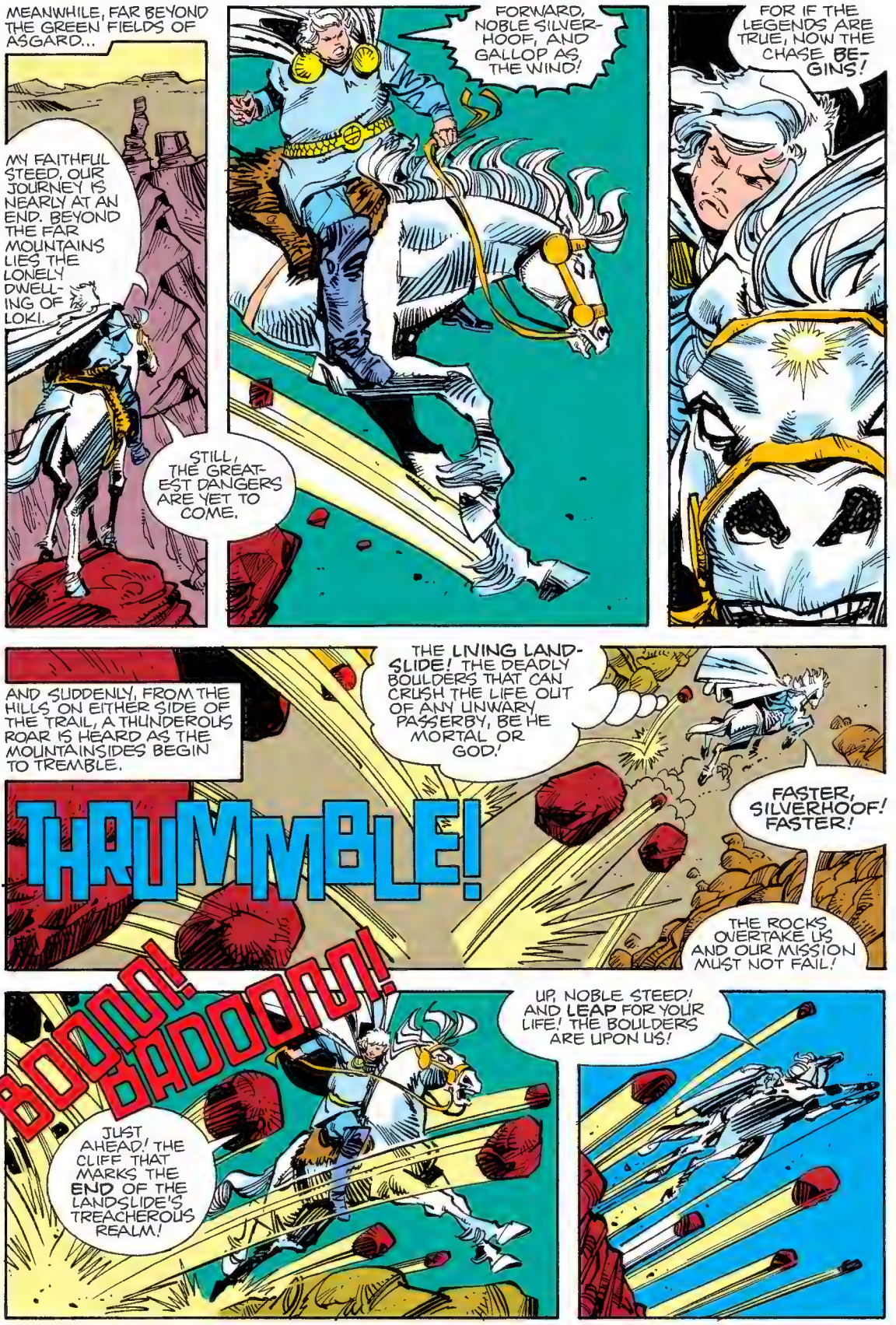

FEAR NOT, HUSBAND. MY CANDLE IS NOT SO EASILY DIMMED.
VERY WELL.
I HAVE SUMMONED BALDER HOME TO ASGARD. FOR HE AND ONLY HE MAY ACCOMPLISH WHAT MUST BE DONE.
AND YET, WHEN ALL IS FINISHED, HE MAY NEVER FORGIVE ME FOR WHAT I AM ABOUT TO DO.
MY LORD--!
HEAR ME OUT, FRIGGA.

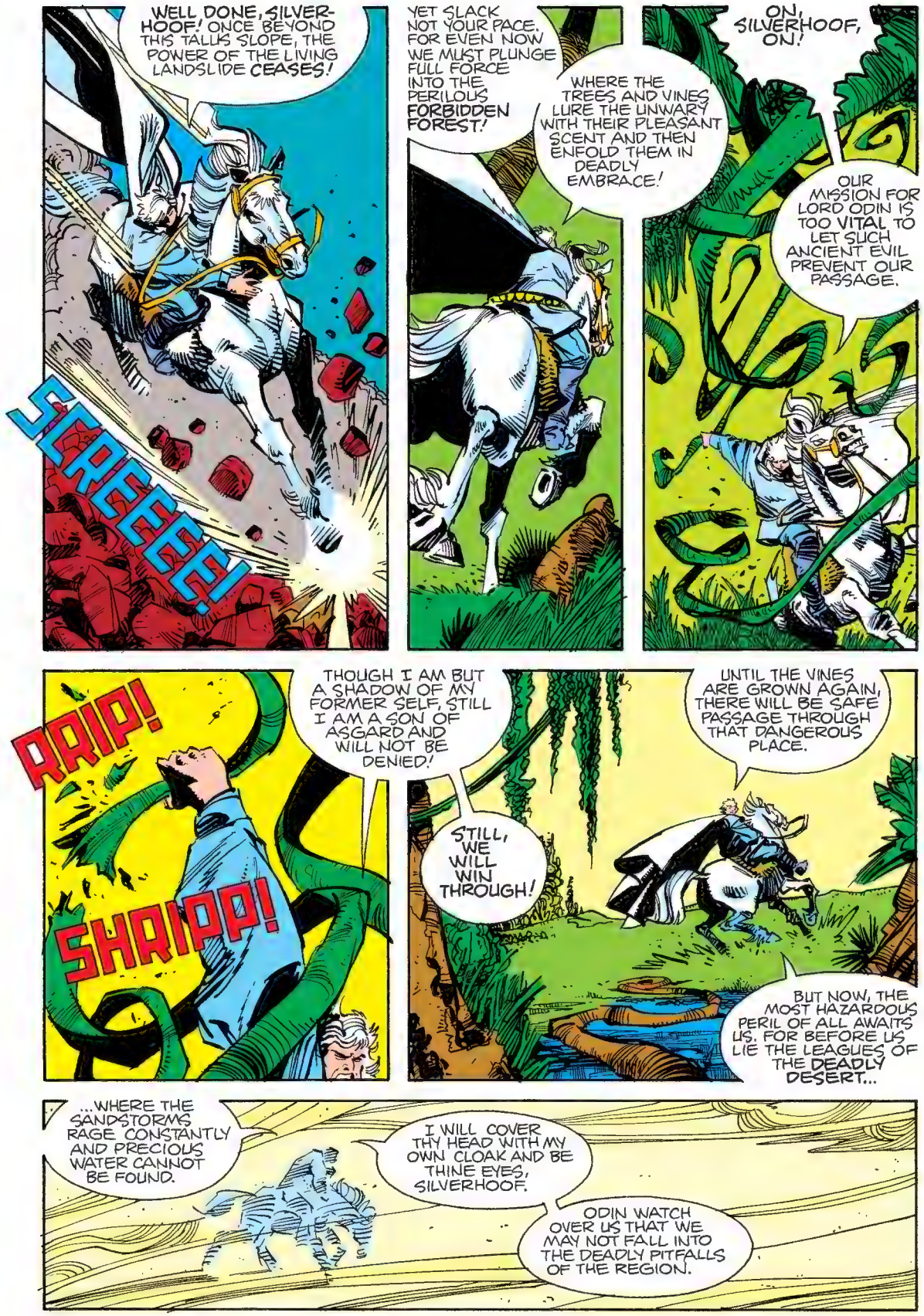

"WHEN I RETURNED FROM MIDGARD YESTEREVE, I FOUND HEIMDALL, GUARDIAN OF THE RAINBOW BRIDGE, AWAITING ME ANXIOUSLY.
"QUICKLY, HE TOOK ME TO HIS HOME BESIDE THE BRIDGE.
"AND THERE I FOUND MUNINN, MY RAVEN, SORELY HURT. HEIMDALL HAD RESCUED HIM WHILE I WAS GONE AND KEPT HIM FOR MY RETURN.
"OF MY OTHER RAVEN, HUGINN, THERE WAS NO SIGN.
"I SENT HEIMDALL BACK TO HIS POST AND SPOKE WITH MUNINN.
"FOR I HAD SENT MY RAVENS ON A MISSION TO PENETRATE THE BURNING GALAXY AND FERRET OUT ITS SECRET.
"I HAD GIVEN THEM GREAT SIZE AND STRENGTH TO DO SO.
"AND NOW ONLY MUNINN HAD RETURNED.
"HIS MAGIC WAS SPENT, HIS VOICE NEARLY GONE.
"WE SPOKE FOR A LONG TIME, HE AND I...
"...TILL FINALLY I LEARNED...
"...WHAT I MUST KNOW.
"THEN I BROUGHT MUNINN HOME.
NOW, FOR ALL OUR SAKES, I MUST SEND LOYAL BALDER INTO THE LION'S DEN FOR ONLY SO CAN THE FATES BE AVERTED AND ALL THAT WE HAVE DONE BE SAVED.
THE DANGER IS EVEN GREATER THAN I FEARED.

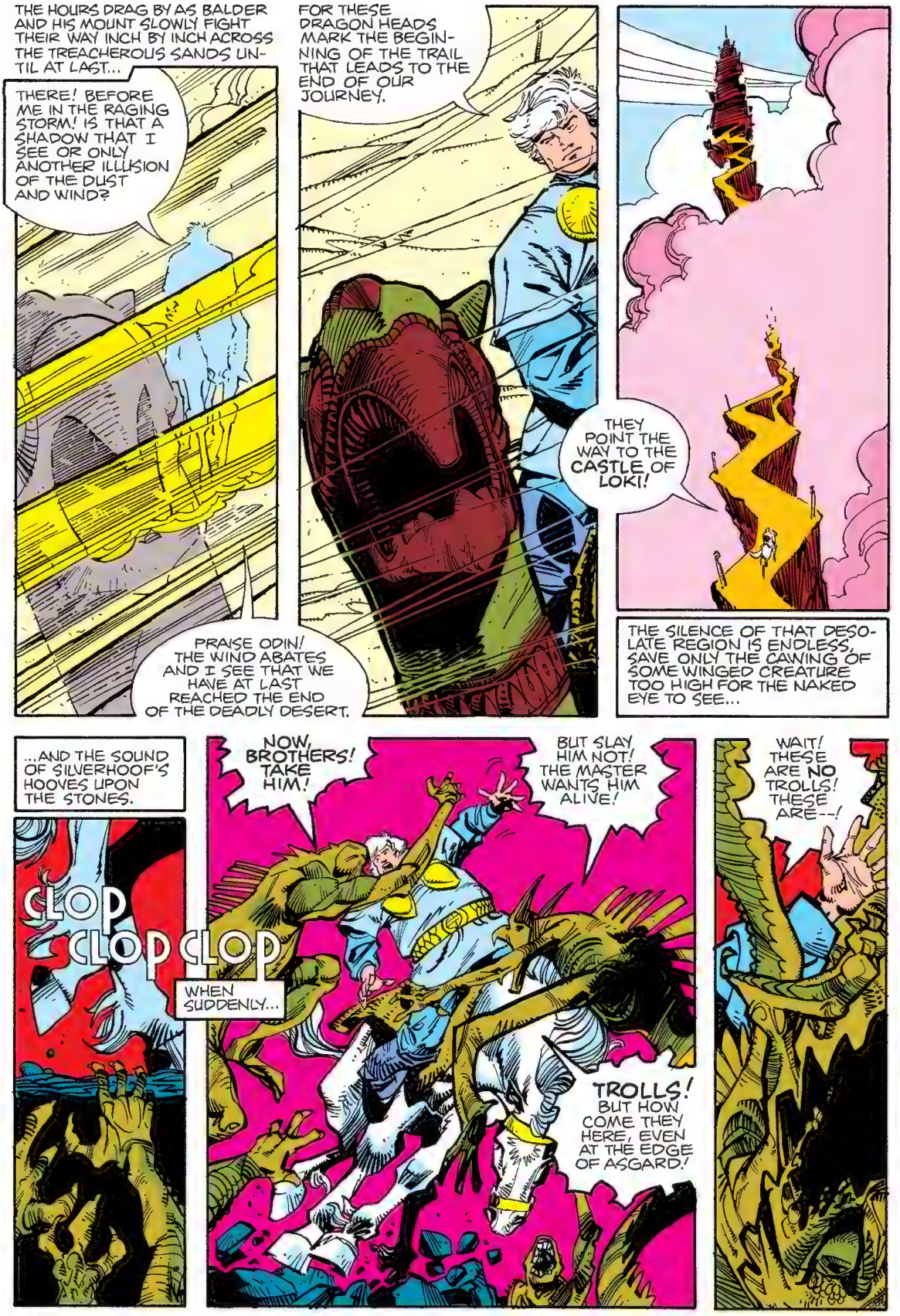
MY LIEGE, I HAVE RETURNED TO ASGARD AT YOUR BIDDING. HOW MAY I SERVE YOU?
NOT EASILY, BRAVE BALDER. FOR I WOULD MAKE YOU MY AMBASSADOR TO DELIVER A LETTER FOR ME...
...AND THOUGH THE JOURNEY ITSELF IS DANGEROUS, IT IS THE ONE WHOM YOU SEEK THAT IS THE GREATEST DANGER.
MY LORD! YOU WOULD SEND ME TO THE GOD RESPONSIBLE FOR MY DEATH*? WHO TRAPPED ME IN HEL WITH THE LEGIONS OF THE DEAD TILL I ESCAPED? WHO DESPISES ME WITH A RANCOR MATCHED ONLY BY HIS HATRED OF THOR HIMSELF?!
I MUST SEND YOU TO... LOKI.
*THOR # 274.
HOW WELL I KNOW IT. AND YET, IN THIS MATTER, MY BRAVE, ONLY YOU WILL DO.
FOR THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS MISSION IS BEYOND TELLING...
...AND THOUGH HE DESPISES YOU, EVEN LOKI KNOWS THAT THE WORD OF BALDER IS THE VERY MEASURE OF TRUTH.
MAYHAP HE WILL BELIEVE YOU AS HE WOULD BELIEVE NO OTHER.
VERY WELL, LORD ODIN. I WILL UNDERTAKE THIS AMBASSADORSHIP.
BUT ON ONE CONDITION. I NO LONGER HAVE THE STOMACH FOR KILLING AND HAVE FORSWORN ALL VIOLENCE. I WILL NOT RAISE A SWORD NOR KILL A SOUL, NOT EVEN FOR ASGARD.
SO BE IT. THESE ARE MATTERS, BRAVE BALDER, OF INDIVIDUAL CONSCIENCE. YOU MUST DO AS YOU THINK BEST.
TAKE THIS LETTER. READ IT AND THEN CARRY IT TO MY STEPSON THAT HE MAY BE PERSUADED TO JOIN WITH US.
AND BALDER, NO ONE ELSE IS TO KNOW OF THIS BUSINESS!
IT SHALL BE DONE, MY LIEGE.


MEANWHILE, IN BAY RIDGE, BROOKLYN, IN A THIRD FLOOR APARTMENT, WE FIND THOR (IN HIS CIVILIAN IDENTITY) ENTERTAINING LORELEI (IN HER CIVILIAN IDENTITY).
HE DOESN'T KNOW WHO SHE IS; SHE KNOWS EXACTLY WHO HE IS!
HMMMMM. THAT DOES INDEED FEEL WONDERFUL. YOU WERE RIGHT, MELODI.
I DIDN'T REALIZE I WAS SO TIRED.
A BACK-RUB WAS JUST WHAT I NEEDED.
I KNEW IT WOULD BE.
OW. GENTLY, PLEASE.
OW.
CRYBABY.
DON'T WORRY. I KNOW JUST WHAT I'M DOING.
THIS IS GOING TO RELAX YOU LIKE NOTHING ELSE EVER HAS.
WHY, WHEN I'M THROUGH, YOU'LL WONDER WHERE I'VE BEEN ALL YOUR LIFE.
HOW ABOUT SOME GOLDEN MEAD TO HELP YOU ENJOY YOURSELF?
HUMMMM?
SIGURD?
SIGURD!

ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ
!
I DON'T BELIEVE IT. HE'S ASLEEP.
AND AFTER ALL THE TROUBLE I WENT TO TO BREW THE ENCHANTED MEAD.
A FEW SIPS AND HE WOULD HAVE BEEN MINE FOREVER!
I'VE GOT A GOOD MIND TO...
IT IS FUNNY, THOUGH. AFTER ALL, I FELL ASLEEP ON HIM THE FIRST TIME WE MET.
AND THIS WON'T BE THE LAST TIME WE SEE EACH OTHER, MY HANDSOME THOR.
cLiicK
NEXT TIME, THE GAME WILL BE MINE. AND SO WILL YOU.
URD— YOU'RE FORGIVEN. BUT ONLY IF YOU LET ME FIX DINNER FOR YOU SATURDAY. I'LL BE IN TOUCH. ❤MELODI

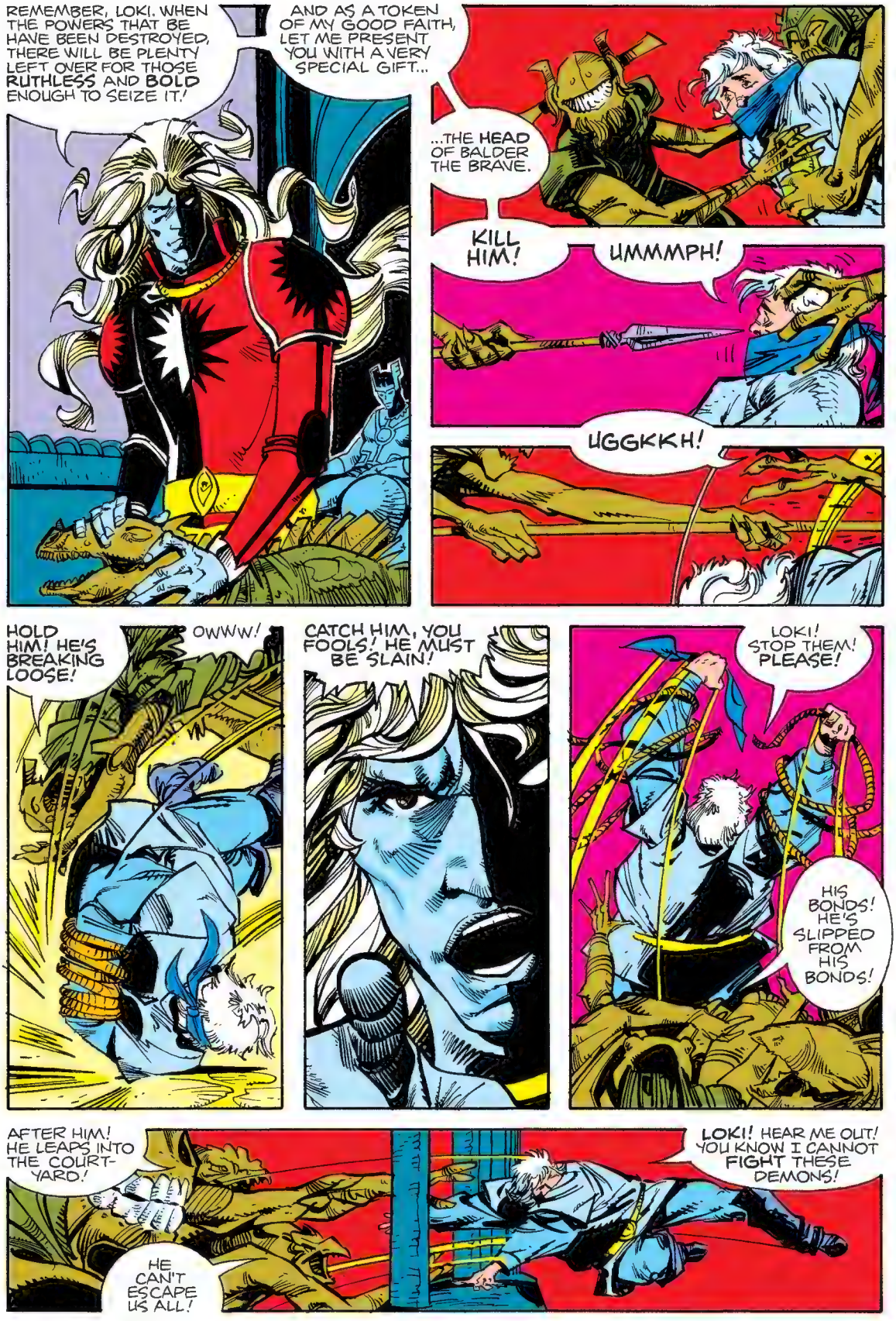

MEANWHILE, FAR BEYOND THE GREEN FIELDS OF ASGARD...
MY FAITHFUL STEED, OUR JOURNEY IS NEARLY AT AN END. BEYOND THE FAR MOUNTAINS LIES THE LONELY DWELLING OF LOKI.
STILL, THE GREATEST DANGERS ARE YET TO COME.
FORWARD, NOBLE SILVERHOOF, AND GALLOP AS THE WIND!
FOR IF THE LEGENDS ARE TRUE, NOW THE CHASE BEGINS!
AND SUDDENLY, FROM THE HILLS ON EITHER SIDE OF THE TRAIL, A THUNDEROUS ROAR IS HEARD AS THE MOUNTAINSIDES BEGIN TO TREMBLE.
THE LIVING LANDSLIDE! THE DEADLY BOULDERS THAT CAN CRUSH THE LIFE OUT OF ANY UNWARY PASSERBY, BE HE MORTAL OR GOD!
THRUMMBLE!
FASTER, SILVERHOOF! FASTER!
THE ROCKS OVERTAKE US AND OUR MISSION MUST NOT FAIL!
BOOM! BADOOOM!
JUST AHEAD! THE CLIFF THAT MARKS THE END OF THE LANDSLIDE'S TREACHEROUS REALM!
UP, NOBLE STEED! AND LEAP FOR YOUR LIFE! THE BOULDERS ARE UPON US!


WELL DONE, SILVERHOOF! ONCE BEYOND THIS TALUS SLOPE, THE POWER OF THE LIVING LANDSLIDE CEASES!
SCREEEE!
YET SLACK NOT YOUR PACE. FOR EVEN NOW WE MUST PLUNGE FULL FORCE INTO THE PERILOUS FORBIDDEN FOREST!
WHERE THE TREES AND VINES LURE THE UNWARY WITH THEIR PLEASANT SCENT AND THEN ENFOLD THEM IN DEADLY EMBRACE!
ON, SILVERHOOF, ON!
OUR MISSION FOR LORD ODIN IS TOO VITAL TO LET SUCH ANCIENT EVIL PREVENT OUR PASSAGE.
RRIP!
SHRIPP!
THOUGH I AM BUT A SHADOW OF MY FORMER SELF, STILL I AM A SON OF ASGARD AND WILL NOT BE DENIED!
STILL, WE WILL WIN THROUGH!
UNTIL THE VINES ARE GROWN AGAIN, THERE WILL BE SAFE PASSAGE THROUGH THAT DANGEROUS PLACE.
BUT NOW, THE MOST HAZARDOUS PERIL OF ALL AWAITS US. FOR BEFORE US LIE THE LEAGUES OF THE DEADLY DESERT...
...WHERE THE SANDSTORMS RAGE CONSTANTLY AND PRECIOUS WATER CANNOT BE FOUND.
I WILL COVER THY HEAD WITH MY OWN CLOAK AND BE THINE EYES, SILVERHOOF.
ODIN WATCH OVER US THAT WE MAY NOT FALL INTO THE DEADLY PITFALLS OF THE REGION.


THE HOURS DRAG BY AS BALDER AND HIS MOUNT SLOWLY FIGHT THEIR WAY INCH BY INCH ACROSS THE TREACHEROUS SANDS UNTIL AT LAST...
THERE! BEFORE ME IN THE RAGING STORM! IS THAT A SHADOW THAT I SEE OR ONLY ANOTHER ILLUSION OF THE DUST AND WIND?
PRAISE ODIN! THE WIND ABATES AND I SEE THAT WE HAVE AT LAST REACHED THE END OF THE DEADLY DESERT.
FOR THESE DRAGON HEADS MARK THE BEGINNING OF THE TRAIL THAT LEADS TO THE END OF OUR JOURNEY.
THEY POINT THE WAY TO THE CASTLE OF LOKI!
THE SILENCE OF THAT DESOLATE REGION IS ENDLESS, SAVE ONLY THE CAWING OF SOME WINGED CREATURE TOO HIGH FOR THE NAKED EYE TO SEE...
...AND THE SOUND OF SILVERHOOF'S HOOVES UPON THE STONES.
CLOP CLOP CLOP CLOP
WHEN SUDDENLY...
NOW, BROTHERS! TAKE HIM!
BUT SLAY HIM NOT! THE MASTER WANTS HIM ALIVE!
TROLLS! BUT HOW COME THEY HERE, EVEN AT THE EDGE OF ASGARD!
WAIT! THESE ARE NO TROLLS! THESE ARE--!

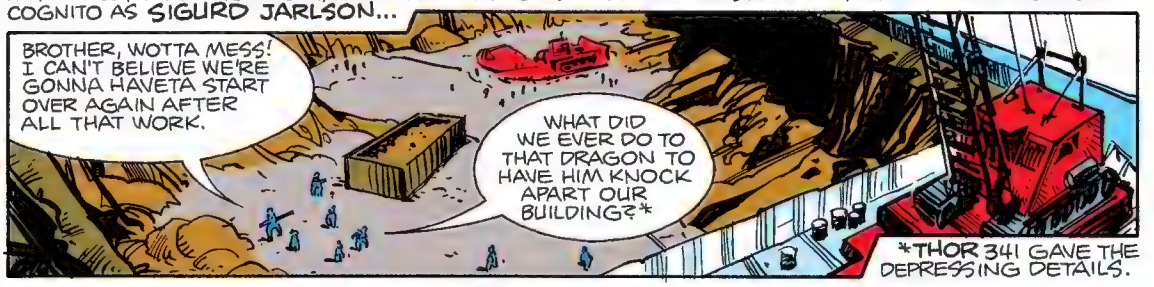
ELSEWHERE, FAR BEYOND THE FIELDS WE KNOW...
...A GREAT FIGURE TURNS FROM THE ANVIL BEFORE HIM AND STRETCHES FORTH HIS HAND.
LAKES OF BRIMSTONE SPRING UP ON EVERY SIDE...
...AND THEN...
CLANG!!
THE SWORD IS TEMPERED!

MEANWHILE, INSIDE THE CASTLE OF...
LOKI! I MIGHT HAVE KNOWN THESE WERE YOUR CREATURES.
ONLY YOU WOULD BE BOLD ENOUGH TO HARBOR DEMONS OF THE FIRE WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF ASGARD!
RELEASE ME! I COME AS AN AMBASSADOR FROM ODIN HIMSELF!
ODIN DOES NOT RULE HERE. NOR IN FACT ARE THE DEMONS MINE.
BUT I HAVE A MESSAGE OF THE VERY HIGHEST IMPORTANCE.
YOU ARE NOT THE FIRST SUCH AMBASSADOR TO REACH ME. STRANGE THAT LOKI'S AID SHOULD SUDDENLY BE SOUGHT BY SO MANY.
PERHAPS YOU REMEMBER THE ONE WHO STANDS BESIDE ME. HE WHOM ODIN DID BANISH TO THE LIMBO OF ENDLESS NIGHT SO MANY AGES AGONE.
MAY I PRESENT MALEKITH, THE DARK ELF.
THE GENTLEMEN HOLDING YOU ARE PART OF HIS ENTOURAGE.
MALEKITH! BUT 'TIS HE AND HIS MASTER WHO WOULD DESTROY US ALL!
LOKI, YOU MUST LISTEN TO ME!
THIS UNSEEMLY OUTBURST DISPLEASES US, MY DEMONS. GAG HIM!
LOK-- MMMMPH!
AH, BALDER, EVER THE TOOTHLESS UNDERSTRAPPER OF THE NOBILITY OF ASGARD.
THE YEARS HAVE NOT BEEN KIND TO YOU, BRAVE BALDER. YOU WERE HANDSOME ONCE.
IS THIS THE BEST THAT ODIN CAN DO?
SEND A SPINELESS, OVERWEIGHT FLUNKY TO CURRY THE FAVOR OF HIS STEP-SON...
...WHEN ALL KNOW THAT ODIN REGRETS EVER HAVING ADOPTED LOKI IN THE FIRST PLACE!

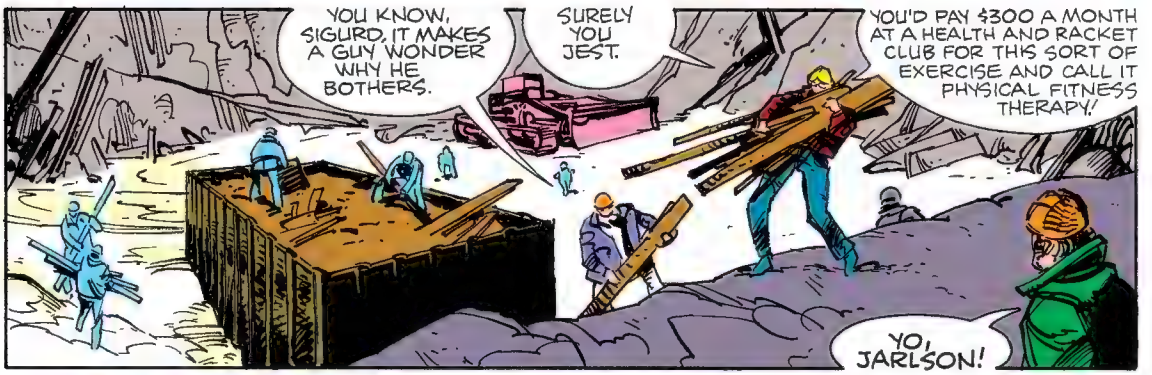

REMEMBER, LOKI. WHEN THE POWERS THAT BE HAVE BEEN DESTROYED, THERE WILL BE PLENTY LEFT OVER FOR THOSE RUTHLESS AND BOLD ENOUGH TO SEIZE IT.
AND AS A TOKEN OF MY GOOD FAITH, LET ME PRESENT YOU WITH A VERY SPECIAL GIFT...
...THE HEAD OF BALDER THE BRAVE.
KILL HIM!
UMMMPH!
UGGKKH!
HOLD HIM! HE'S BREAKING LOOSE!
OWWW!
CATCH HIM, YOU FOOLS! HE MUST BE SLAIN!
LOKI! STOP THEM! PLEASE!
HIS BONDS! HE'S SLIPPED FROM HIS BONDS!
AFTER HIM! HE LEAPS INTO THE COURT-YARD!
HE CAN'T ESCAPE US ALL!
LOKI! HEAR ME OUT! YOU KNOW I CANNOT FIGHT THESE DEMONS!

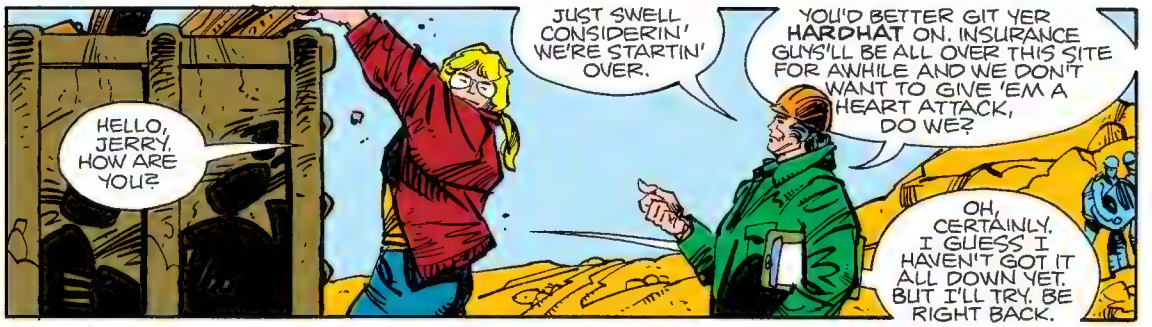
LOKI! HEED MY PLEA!
UMMPH!
SEEK NOT MY DESTRUCTION UNTIL YOU KNOW THE TRUTH! THEN GLADLY WILL I DIE!
THE VERY FATE OF THE UNIVERSE DEPENDS UPON MY WORDS!
NOW WE HAVE HIM. CLOSE IN, BROTHERS, AND WE WILL SPLIT THE ASGARDIAN LIKE A RIPE FRUIT.
SO IT IS TRUE. BALDER THE BRAVE HAS BECOME A SPINELESS MILKSOP!
AFRAID TO KILL EVEN THE DEMONS OF HEL!
LOKI! PLEASE! MY MISSION MUST NOT FAIL!
COME, MALEKITH. YOU AND I HAVE MUCH TO DISCUSS.
I DON'T SUPPOSE WE'LL EVER LEARN WHAT ODIN'S MESSAGE WAS NOW.
PITY!
LOKI!
NOW BY MY HAND DIES BALDER THE BRAVE!
NO! DO NOT MAKE ME DO IT!
THWACKK!
KILL HIM!
KILL HIM!

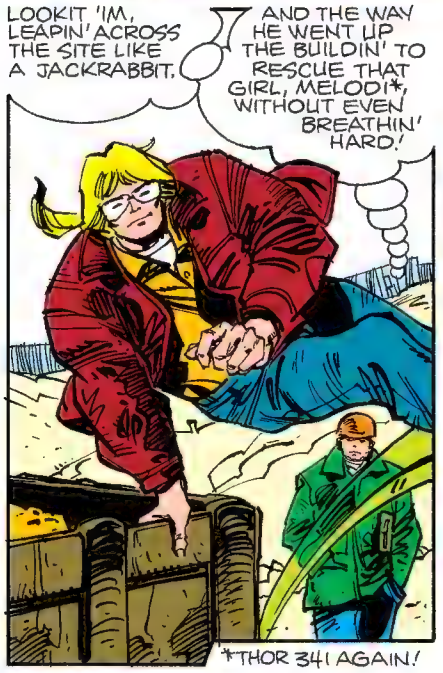
MEANWHILE, IN NEW YORK CITY, AT A CONSTRUCTION SITE ON THE HUDSON RIVER, WHERE THOR WORKS INCOGNITO AS **SIGURD JARLSON**...


BROTHER, WOTTA MESS! I CAN'T BELIEVE WE'RE GONNA HAVETA START OVER AGAIN AFTER ALL THAT WORK.
WHAT DID WE EVER DO TO THAT DRAGON TO HAVE HIM KNOCK APART OUR BUILDING?*

*THOR 341 GAVE THE DEPRESSING DETAILS.

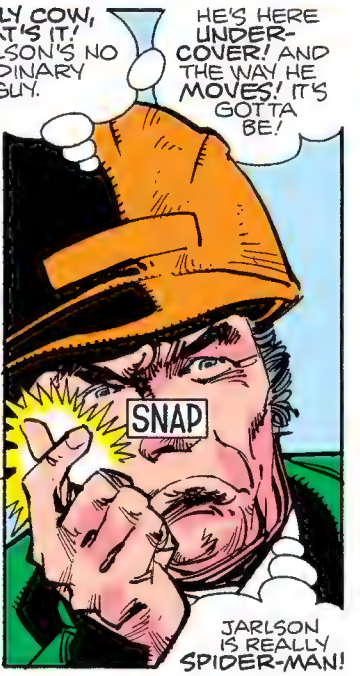

YOU KNOW, SIGURD, IT MAKES A GUY WONDER WHY HE BOTHERS.
SURELY YOU JEST.
YOU'D PAY $300 A MONTH AT A HEALTH AND RACKET CLUB FOR THIS SORT OF EXERCISE AND CALL IT PHYSICAL FITNESS THERAPY!
YO, JARLSON!

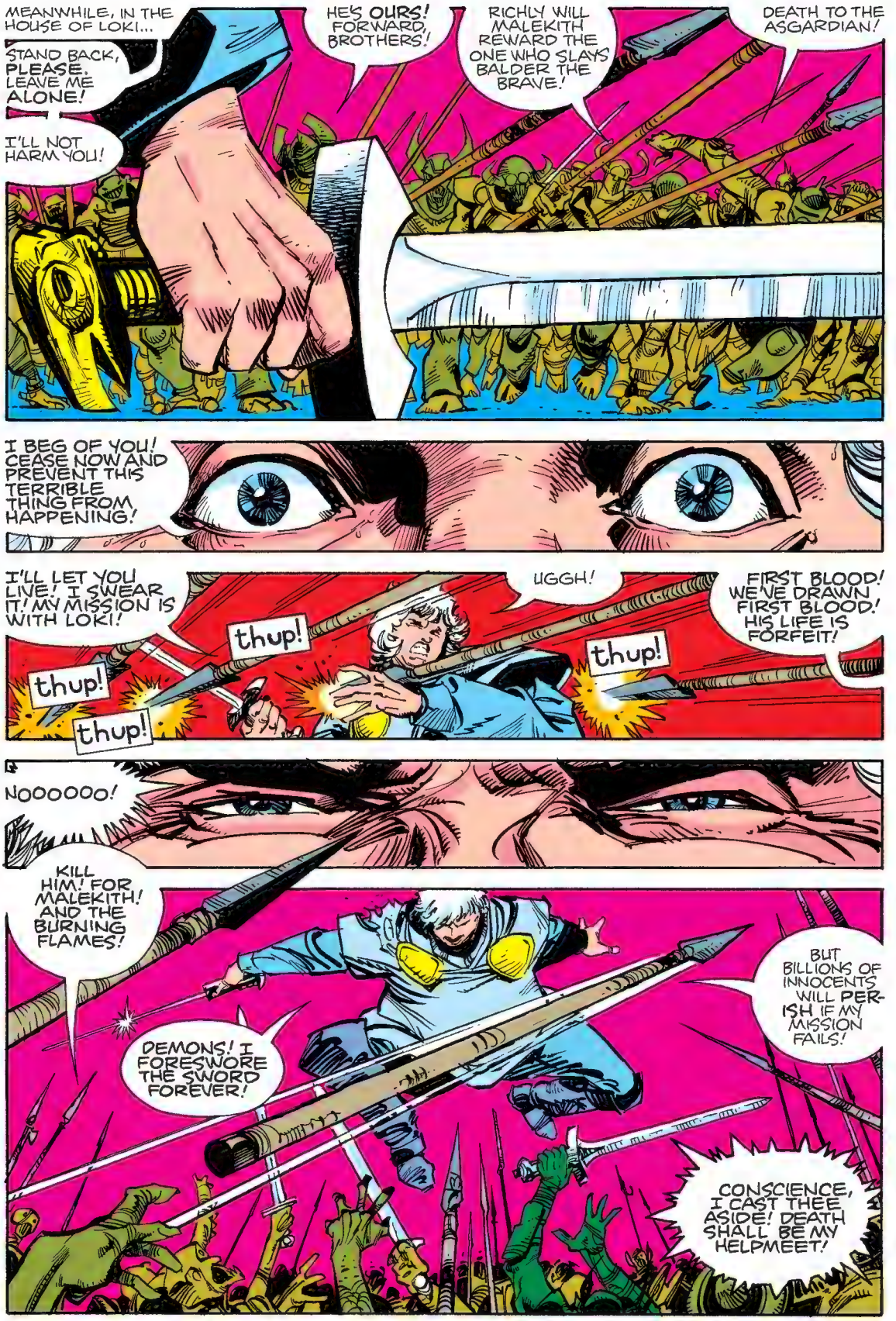

HELLO, JERRY. HOW ARE YOU?
JUST SWELL CONSIDERIN' WE'RE STARTIN' OVER.
YOU'D BETTER GIT YER **HARDHAT** ON. INSURANCE GUYS'LL BE ALL OVER THIS SITE FOR AWHILE AND WE DON'T WANT TO GIVE 'EM A HEART ATTACK, DO WE?
OH, CERTAINLY. I GUESS I HAVEN'T GOT IT ALL DOWN YET. BUT I'LL TRY. BE RIGHT BACK.


LOOKIT 'IM, LEAPIN' ACROSS THE SITE LIKE A JACKRABBIT.
AND THE WAY HE WENT UP THE BUILDIN' TO RESCUE THAT GIRL, MELODI*, WITHOUT EVEN BREATHIN' HARD!

*THOR 341 AGAIN!

NO NORMAL JOE COULD DO THAT. HE AIN'T A CONSTRUCTION WORKER.
AN' HE WAS SENT HERE BY COUSIN NICK WHO WORKS FOR SOME SUPERSECRET SPY GUYS.


HOLY COW, THAT'S IT! JARLSON'S NO ORDINARY GUY.
HE'S HERE **UNDER-COVER!** AND THE WAY HE **MOVES!** IT'S GOTTA BE!
SNAP
JARLSON IS REALLY **SPIDER-MAN!**


MEANWHILE, IN THE HOUSE OF LOKI...
STAND BACK, PLEASE. LEAVE ME ALONE!
I'LL NOT HARM YOU!
HE'S OURS! FORWARD, BROTHERS!
RICHLY WILL MALEKITH REWARD THE ONE WHO SLAYS BALDER THE BRAVE!
DEATH TO THE ASGARDIAN!
I BEG OF YOU! CEASE NOW AND PREVENT THIS TERRIBLE THING FROM HAPPENING!
I'LL LET YOU LIVE! I SWEAR IT! MY MISSION IS WITH LOKI!
thup!
thup!
thup!
UGGH!
thup!
FIRST BLOOD! WE'VE DRAWN FIRST BLOOD! HIS LIFE IS FORFEIT!
NOOOOOO!
KILL HIM! FOR MALEKITH! AND THE BURNING FLAMES!
DEMONS! I FORESWORE THE SWORD FOREVER!
BUT BILLIONS OF INNOCENTS WILL PERISH IF MY MISSION FAILS!
CONSCIENCE, I CAST THEE ASIDE! DEATH SHALL BE MY HELPMEET!

FIENDS!
SWHRIPP!
DEVILS!
SLLASH!
YOU'VE DESTROYED ME!
WHIRPKK!
AND EVERY-THING I HOLD DEAR!
SKASSTH!
EVERYTHING!
WRIPTH!
NOW DIE!
SLATSCH!
DIE!
WASSCH!
DIE!
SLISSCSK!
DIE!
SLASHH!
WHIKK!
MALEKITH!
WELL PLAYED, BALDER. A VERY DRAMATIC ENTRANCE!
SO WE DID DEVELOP SOME BACKBONE DURING OUR SOJOURN IN HEL AFTER ALL.

MALEKITH, FOUL CREATURE. FOR WHAT YOU HAVE DONE TO ME THIS DAY, YOU WILL LIE WITH YOUR DEMONS TONIGHT IN HEL!
SLASSTH!
WHA--!
HE'S GONE. AND ONLY HIS CLOAK REMAINS.
FOOLISH BALDER. DO YOU NOT REMEMBER THE POWER OF THE DARK ELF, TO ENTER THE SHADOWS AND VANISH...
...TO TRAVEL WHERE HE WILL AND EMERGE EVEN ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE UNIVERSE.
HE HAS ESCAPED YOU.
BUT NOT PREVENTED ME FROM FULFILLING MY DUTY.
HERE IS THE LETTER, LOKI. THOUGH IT COST ME MY SOUL, I HAVE COMPLETED MY MISSION. FOR MY LORD ODIN.
THE FATE OF THE UNIVERSE HANGS IN THE BALANCE.
YOU ARE A FOOL, BALDER, TO THINK THAT A MESSAGE FROM MY STEP-FATHER COULD POSSIBLY BE OF CONCERN TO ME.
WHAT?!
I HAVE ALREADY DECIDED TO ACCEPT MALEKITH'S OFFER.
AFTER ALL, I HAVE THE BLOOD OF GIANTS IN MY VEINS, AS MY STEP-FATHER NEVER TIRES OF REMINDING ME.

BUT IT WAS SO DELIGHTFUL TO WATCH A PACIFIST SLAY HIS THOUSANDS THAT I SIMPLY COULDN'T BRING MYSELF TO MENTION IT BEFORE THIS.
WHY, IT WOULD HAVE SPOILED THE FUN.
DEVILSPAWN! WAS IT NOT ENOUGH THAT YOU KILL ME AND SEND ME DOWN TO HEL?
NOW YOU DESTROY WHAT LITTLE LIFE I HAD LEFT!
ASGARD MAY YET PERISH BY THE SWORD BUT NOT BEFORE I RID THE WORLD OF THE DEADLIEST SERPENT IN HER HALLS!
THREATEN ME NOT, THOU SAPLESS WEAKLING.
THOU HAST NOT THE METTLE FOR THE DEED!
LIAR!
SHLIKKK!
THUD

ELSEWHERE, IN THE FORTRESS OF KARNILLA...
I CANNOT DO IT!
EVEN HERE, IN THE CHAMBERS OF MY GREATEST SORCERY, MY MAGICKS CANNOT PIERCE THE MYSTIC SCREENS SURROUNDING LOKI'S DOMAIN.
AND BALDER'S FATE REMAINS UNKNOWN TO ME.
SURELY, MISTRESS, LOKI WOULD NOT DARE TO HARM BALDER WHEN HE IS ON A MISSION FOR ODIN.
I DO NOT TRUST THE SLY ONE. HE WOULD BETRAY ANYONE IF IT SUITED HIS PURPOSE.
HE IS SO UNPREDICTABLE, HIS GAMES SO TWISTED THAT--
WEEEO
THE ALARM! SOMEONE HAS EMERGED FROM THE MISTS SURROUNDING LOKI'S CASTLE!
OH NO!
'TIS BALDER, MY LADY. BUT HIS FACE! LOOK AT HIS FACE!
HE HAS THE LOOK OF THE DAMNED ABOUT HIM!

ARRRGGGH!
RIDE ON! RIDE ON, SILVER-HOOF!
BETTER THAT I HAD DIED AND STAYED IN HEL THAN RETURN TO THIS EXISTENCE WHICH TORTURES ME BEYOND ENDURANCE!
NOW SHALL I LOSE MYSELF IN THE TRACKLESS WASTES BEYOND KARNILLA'S LAND AND SEEK OUT DEATH, MY ONLY FRIEND AND COMPANION...
...THAT I MIGHT END THIS AGONY OF LIVING AND REJOIN THE SERRIED RANKS OF THE DEAD!
MAY IT BE SOON!
RIDE ON, SILVER-HOOF! RIDE ON!
"TILL ONLY THE WHISPERS OF THE WIND ARE LEFT TO DISTURB THE SILENCE OF THE ANCIENT AND ILLIMITABLE DESERT...
"...AND BALDER THE BRAVE IS NO MORE."

WHILE BEHIND THE FLEEING BALDER IN THE CASTLE OF LOKI, ALL IS QUIET.
THE HEARTH FIRES BURN LOW...
...AND EVEN THE VERMIN IN THE WALLS ARE SILENT...
...UNTIL...
AH, HERE WE ARE.
UNBRUISED, TOO. I MUST SAY THAT I NEVER THOUGHT HE WOULD HAVE THE STOMACH FOR IT.
ALAS, POOR BALDER!— I KNEW HIM, HORATIO.
A GOD LACKING ANY SENSE OF HUMOR WHATSOEVER!
AN EXCELLENT JEST. WELL WORTH THE PRICE OF A STIFF NECK FOR A DAY OR SO.
AFTER ALL, THE FIRST THING A SORCEROR OF QUALITY LEARNS IS TO MAKE HIMSELF AS DIFFICULT TO KILL AS POSSIBLE!
AH, BALDER, THY NAME IS LAUGHTER!

next: **DINNER FOR TWO** or **THAT WAS NO LADY!**

RETURN WITH US NOW TO MIDGARD... IN WHICH ONE MAN'S JOURNEY ENDS IN DEADLY ECSTASY, AND THE THUNDER GOD ENJOYS A FREE MEAL!

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The Mighty
THOR

STAN LEE PRESENTS ✦ the MIGHTY THOR®

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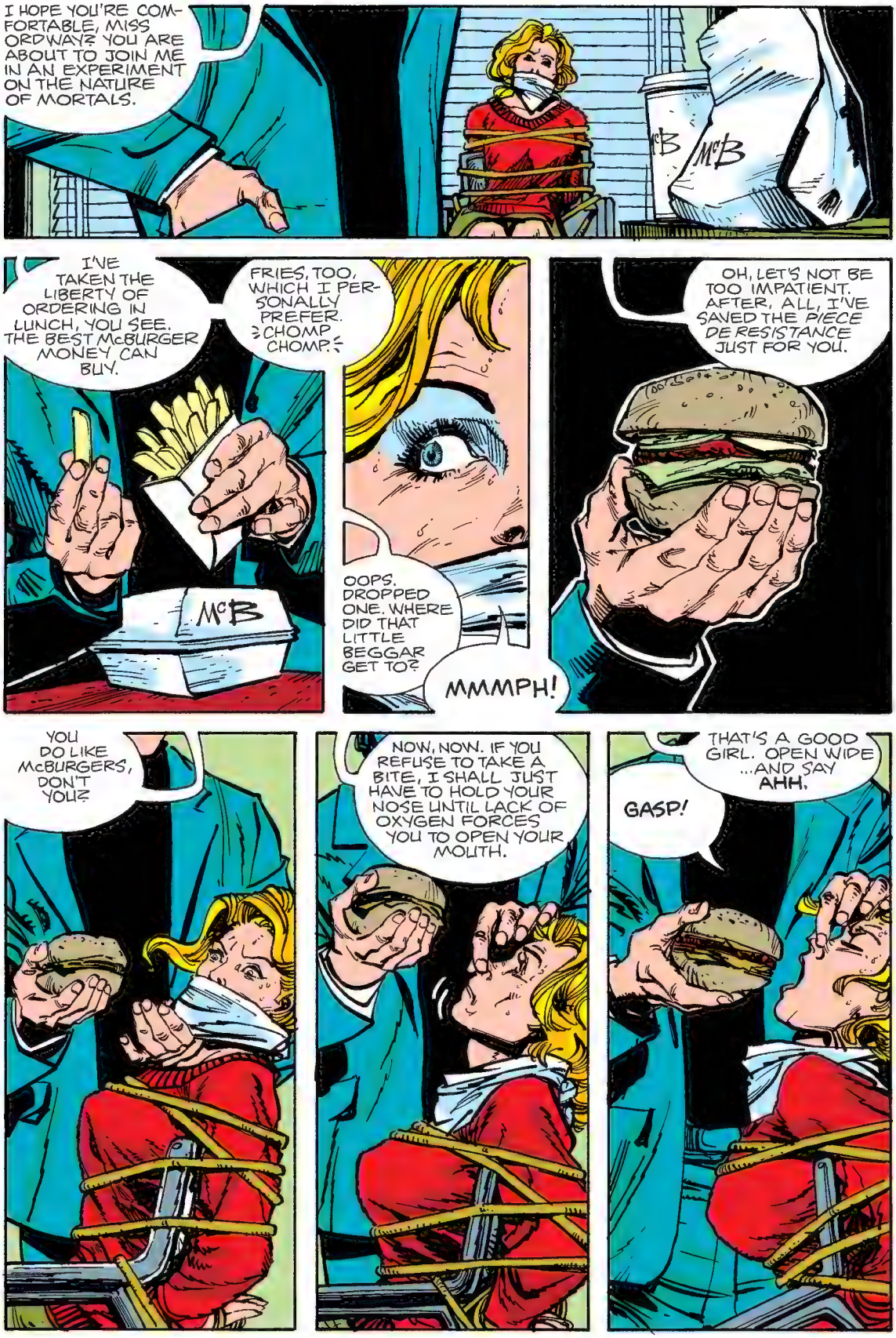
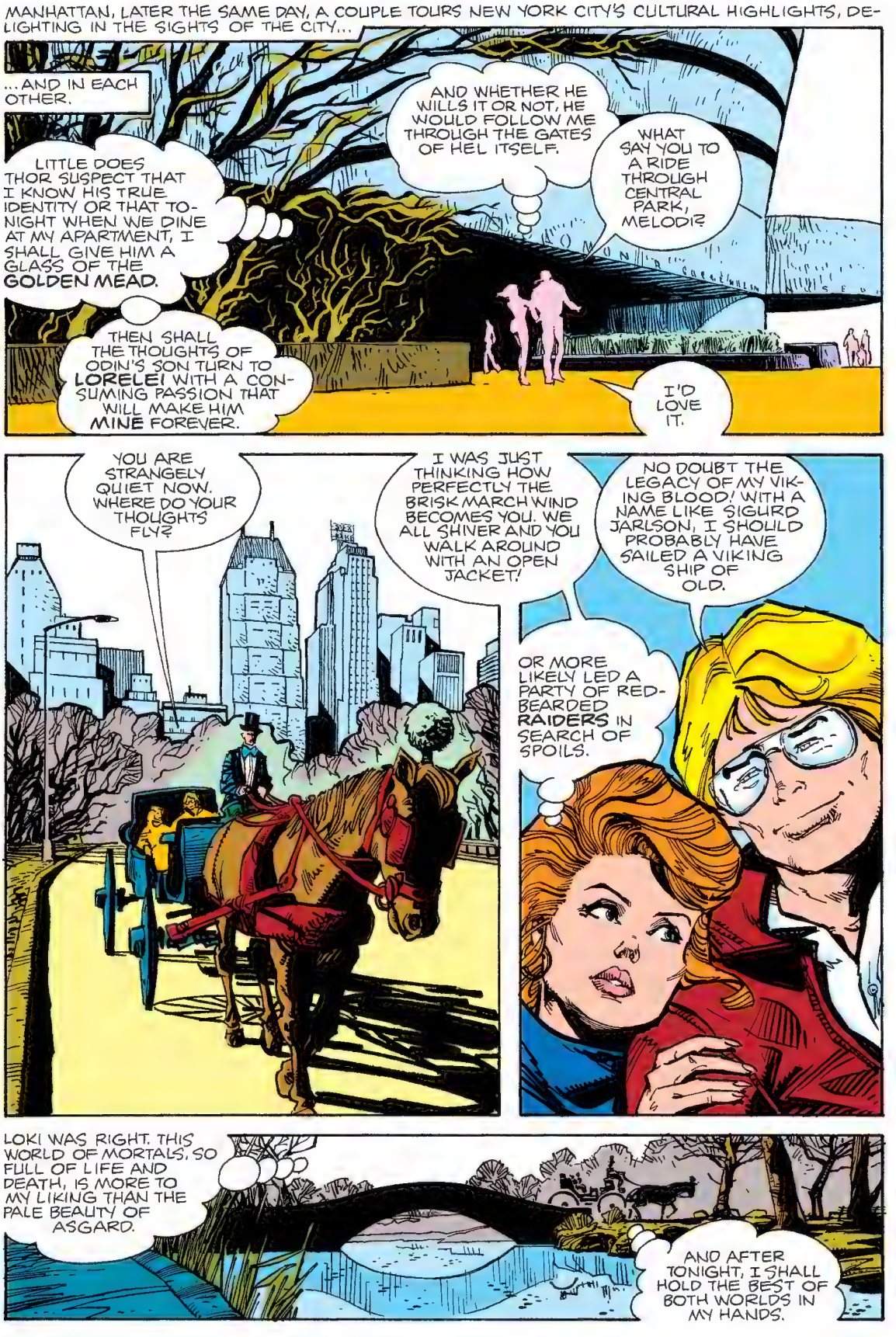
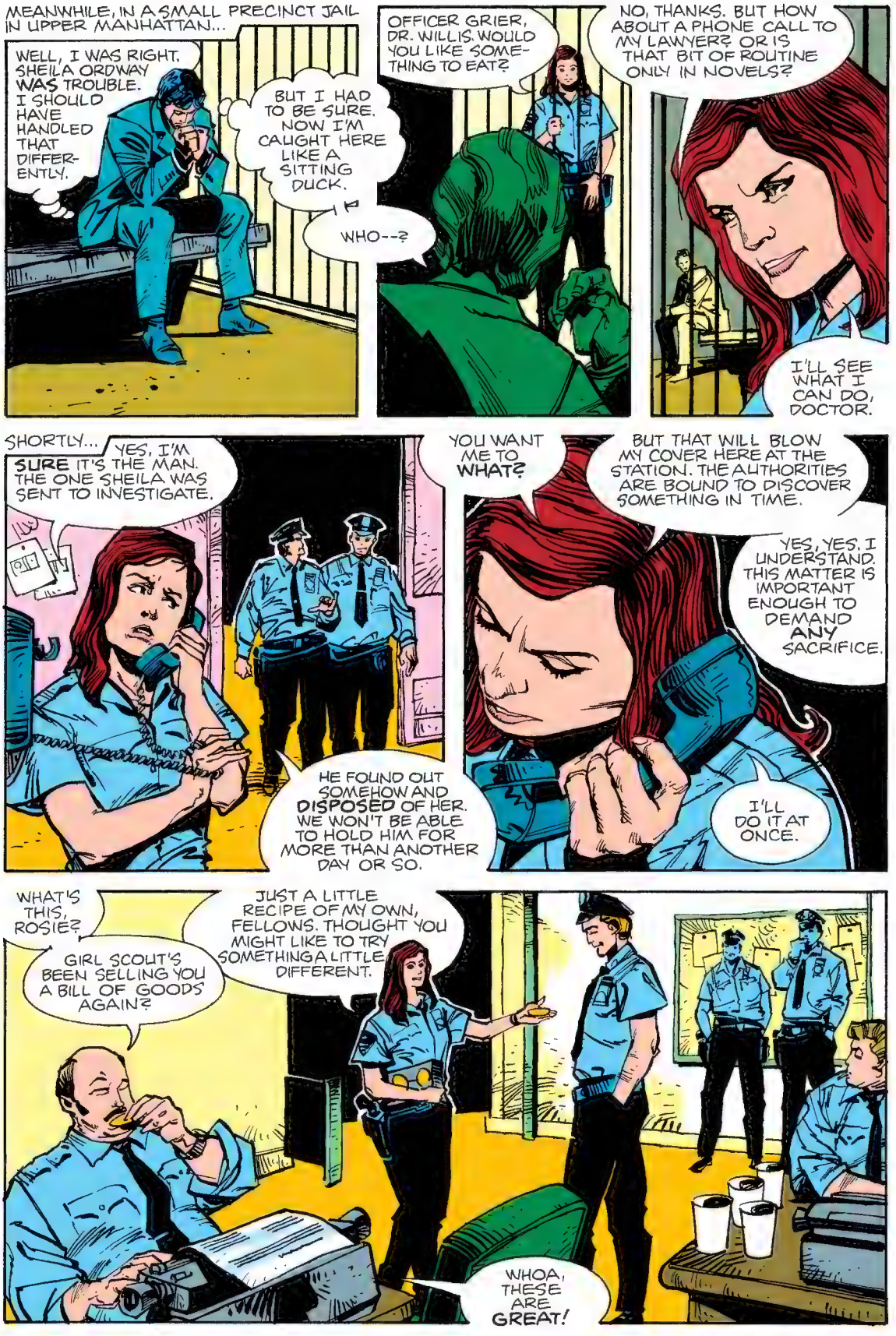
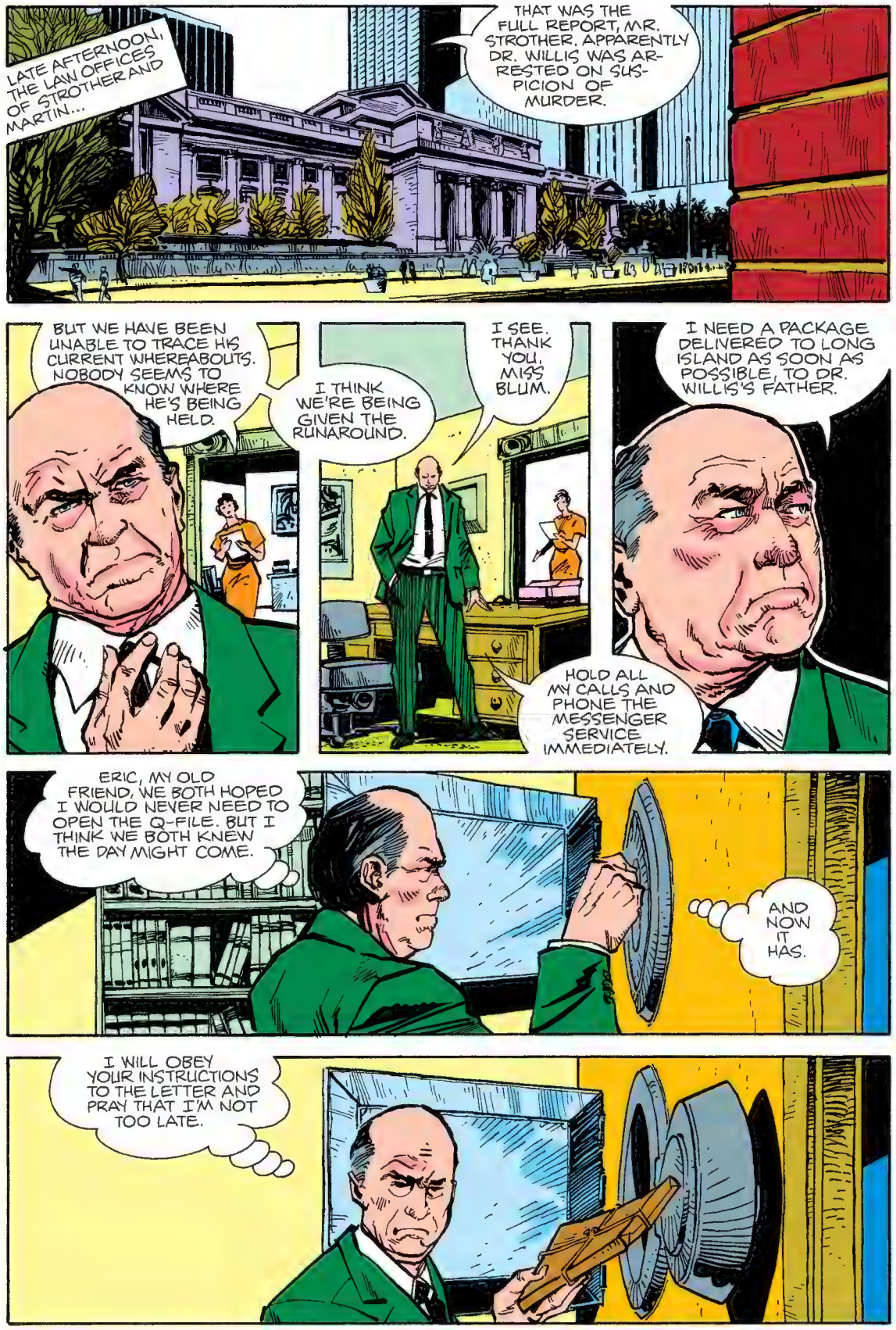

I HOPE YOU'RE COMFORTABLE, MISS ORDWAY? YOU ARE ABOUT TO JOIN ME IN AN EXPERIMENT ON THE NATURE OF MORTALS.
McB
I'VE TAKEN THE LIBERTY OF ORDERING IN LUNCH, YOU SEE. THE BEST McBURGER MONEY CAN BUY.
FRIES, TOO, WHICH I PERSONALLY PREFER. =CHOMP CHOMP=
McB
OOPS. DROPPED ONE. WHERE DID THAT LITTLE BEGGAR GET TO?
MMMPH!
OH, LET'S NOT BE TOO IMPATIENT. AFTER, ALL, I'VE SAVED THE PIECE DE RESISTANCE JUST FOR YOU.
YOU DO LIKE McBURGERS, DON'T YOU?
NOW, NOW. IF YOU REFUSE TO TAKE A BITE, I SHALL JUST HAVE TO HOLD YOUR NOSE UNTIL LACK OF OXYGEN FORCES YOU TO OPEN YOUR MOUTH.
GASP!
THAT'S A GOOD GIRL. OPEN WIDE ...AND SAY AHH.

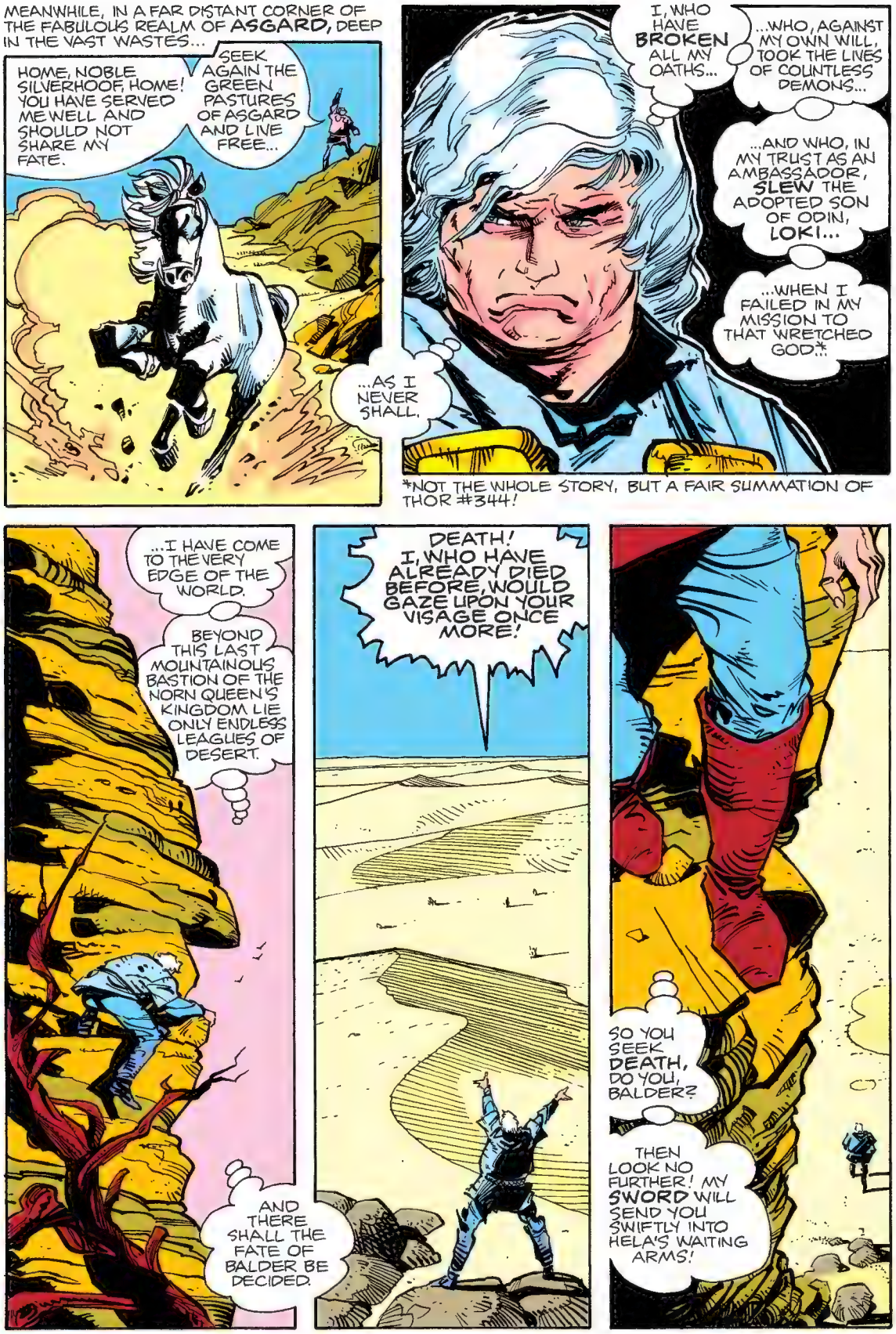
I'M TELLIN' YA, MARTY, THE WAY THAT GUY WAS LOOKIN' AT HER, I'DA SHOVED HIM UNDER THE TRAIN MYSELF.
EEEE-UK-UK-UK!
MIND YOU, WITH THOSE LEGS, NO JURY IN THE WORLD'S GONNA CONVICT HER-- HUH?
WHAT WAS THAT?
SOUNDED LIKE SOMEBODY IN REAL TROUBLE.
POLICE! OPEN UP IN THERE!
NO ANSWER!
THEN LET'S GO IN!
KREEASH!
THROUGH THE RECEPTION ROOM, QUICK!
YES, GENTLEMEN? I'M DOCTOR WILLIS.
I TAKE IT YOU HAVE SOME EXPLANATION FOR THIS OUTRAGE?
WE HEARD SCREAMS COMING FROM THIS OFFICE. WHO ELSE IS HERE, DOCTOR?
AS YOU CAN SEE, OFFICER, NO ONE. CARE FOR A FRENCH FRY?
HEY, MARTY, LOOKIT THIS. THERE'S ROPES AND CLOTHES TIED TO THIS CHAIR. AND IT'S ALL COVERED WITH SOME KINDA DUST.
THOSE ARE MISS ORDWAY'S CLOTHES! I SAW HER COME IN THIS MORNING!
DIDN'T SEE HER LEAVE.
AND THERE'S NO OTHER WAY OUT OF THIS OFFICE.
I DON'T LIKE THE LOOKS OF THIS.
MAYBE YOU'D BETTER COME DOWN TO THE STATION, DOCTOR WILLIS.
READ 'IM HIS RIGHTS, MARTY.
THAT WAS NO LADY!

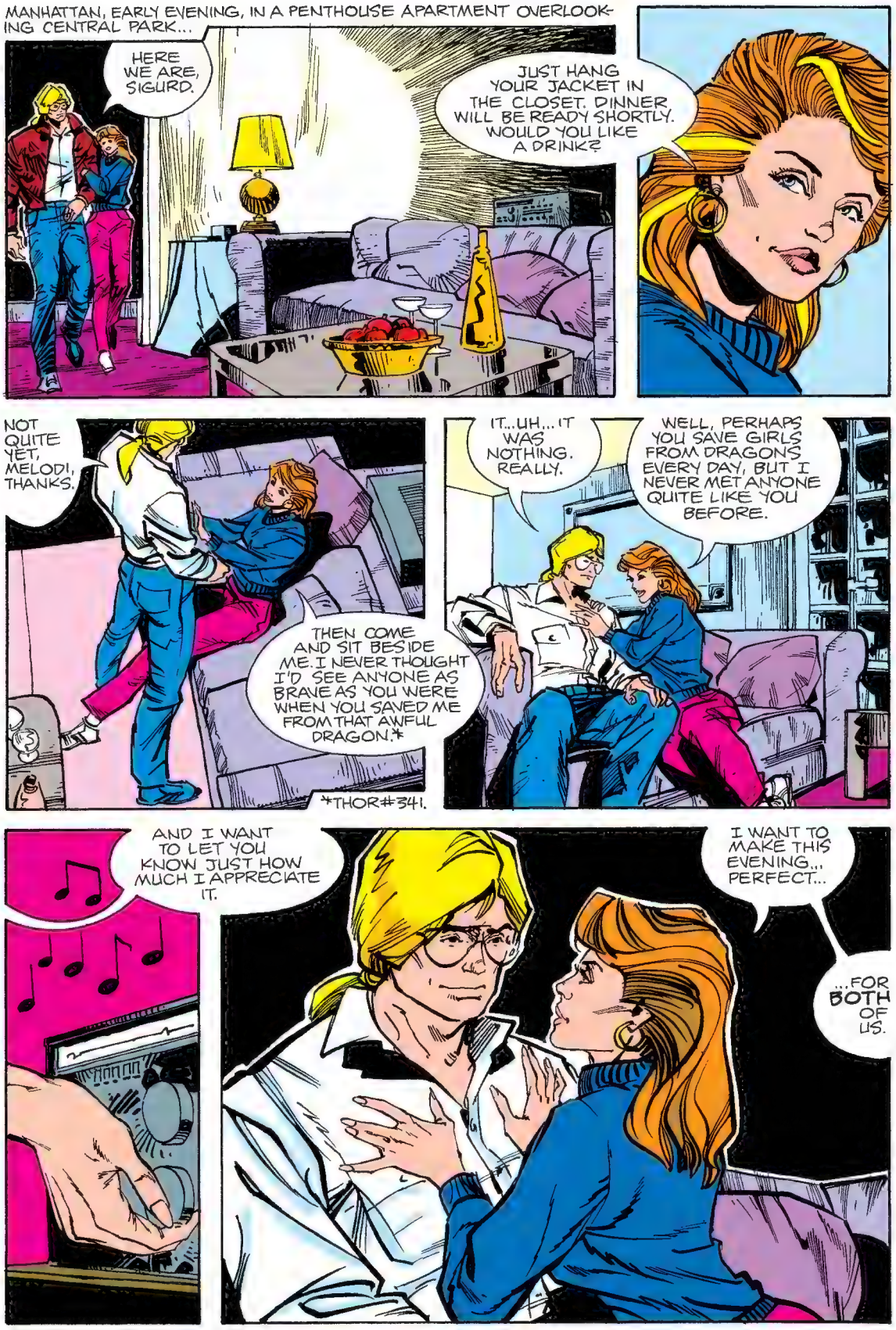

MANHATTAN, LATER THE SAME DAY, A COUPLE TOURS NEW YORK CITY'S CULTURAL HIGHLIGHTS, DELIGHTING IN THE SIGHTS OF THE CITY...
...AND IN EACH OTHER.
LITTLE DOES THOR SUSPECT THAT I KNOW HIS TRUE IDENTITY OR THAT TONIGHT WHEN WE DINE AT MY APARTMENT, I SHALL GIVE HIM A GLASS OF THE GOLDEN MEAD.
THEN SHALL THE THOUGHTS OF ODIN'S SON TURN TO LORELEI WITH A CONSUMING PASSION THAT WILL MAKE HIM MINE FOREVER.
AND WHETHER HE WILLS IT OR NOT, HE WOULD FOLLOW ME THROUGH THE GATES OF HEL ITSELF.
WHAT SAY YOU TO A RIDE THROUGH CENTRAL PARK, MELODI?
I'D LOVE IT.
YOU ARE STRANGELY QUIET NOW. WHERE DO YOUR THOUGHTS FLY?
I WAS JUST THINKING HOW PERFECTLY THE BRISK MARCH WIND BECOMES YOU. WE ALL SHIVER AND YOU WALK AROUND WITH AN OPEN JACKET!
NO DOUBT THE LEGACY OF MY VIKING BLOOD! WITH A NAME LIKE SIGURD JARLSON, I SHOULD PROBABLY HAVE SAILED A VIKING SHIP OF OLD.
OR MORE LIKELY LED A PARTY OF RED-BEARDED RAIDERS IN SEARCH OF SPOILS.
LOKI WAS RIGHT. THIS WORLD OF MORTALS, SO FULL OF LIFE AND DEATH, IS MORE TO MY LIKING THAN THE PALE BEAUTY OF ASGARD.
AND AFTER TONIGHT, I SHALL HOLD THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS IN MY HANDS.


MEANWHILE, IN A SMALL PRECINCT JAIL IN UPPER MANHATTAN...
WELL, I WAS RIGHT. SHEILA ORDWAY WAS TROUBLE. I SHOULD HAVE HANDLED THAT DIFFERENTLY.
BUT I HAD TO BE SURE. NOW I'M CAUGHT HERE LIKE A SITTING DUCK.
WHO--?
OFFICER GRIER, DR. WILLIS WOULD YOU LIKE SOMETHING TO EAT?
NO, THANKS. BUT HOW ABOUT A PHONE CALL TO MY LAWYER? OR IS THAT BIT OF ROUTINE ONLY IN NOVELS?
I'LL SEE WHAT I CAN DO, DOCTOR.
SHORTLY...
YES, I'M SURE IT'S THE MAN. THE ONE SHEILA WAS SENT TO INVESTIGATE.
HE FOUND OUT SOMEHOW AND DISPOSED OF HER. WE WON'T BE ABLE TO HOLD HIM FOR MORE THAN ANOTHER DAY OR SO.
YOU WANT ME TO WHAT?
BUT THAT WILL BLOW MY COVER HERE AT THE STATION. THE AUTHORITIES ARE BOUND TO DISCOVER SOMETHING IN TIME.
YES, YES. I UNDERSTAND. THIS MATTER IS IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO DEMAND ANY SACRIFICE.
I'LL DO IT AT ONCE.
WHAT'S THIS, ROSIE?
GIRL SCOUT'S BEEN SELLING YOU A BILL OF GOODS AGAIN?
JUST A LITTLE RECIPE OF MY OWN, FELLOWS. THOUGHT YOU MIGHT LIKE TO TRY SOMETHING A LITTLE DIFFERENT.
WHOA, THESE ARE GREAT!

IN THE CELL...
SOMETHING'S WRONG. NOBODY'S COME BACK HERE IN OVER AN HOUR.
IT'S THAT LADY COP. I SHOULD HAVE RECOGNIZED HER AURA.
THEY'VE FOUND ME AGAIN.
QUITE RIGHT, DOCTOR WILLIS. AND THIS TIME, YOU'LL NOT ESCAPE US.
I'VE MADE CERTAIN OF THAT!
AND NOW I'LL MAKE CERTAIN OF YOU.
WHO ARE YOU?
AN OBEDIENT SERVANT OF YOUR DEADLIEST ENEMY, DOCTOR.
AN ENEMY WHO HAS DECIDED TO BE MERCIFUL.
THERE IS NO HOPE OF ESCAPE.
EVERYONE IN THE STATION HAS ALREADY TASTED MY SPECIAL COOKIES. AND ENJOYED THEM IMMENSELY, I MIGHT ADD.
NOW THEY ARE OURS, AS SOULLESS AND OBEDIENT AS I AM MYSELF.
AS YOU WILL BE IF YOU TASTE THESE UNMORTAL WAFERS.
THERE IS NO PAIN, I PROMISE YOU. AND EVERYTHING WILL BE SO EASY.
DENY YOURSELF THIS PLEASURE, AND YOU WILL STILL TELL US EVERYTHING WE WISH TO KNOW.
AFTER WHICH, MY MASTER MAY AMUSE HIMSELF BY CALLING OUT THE WILD HUNT WITH YOU AS THE QUARRY!
I'LL BE BACK SHORTLY FOR YOUR ANSWER.

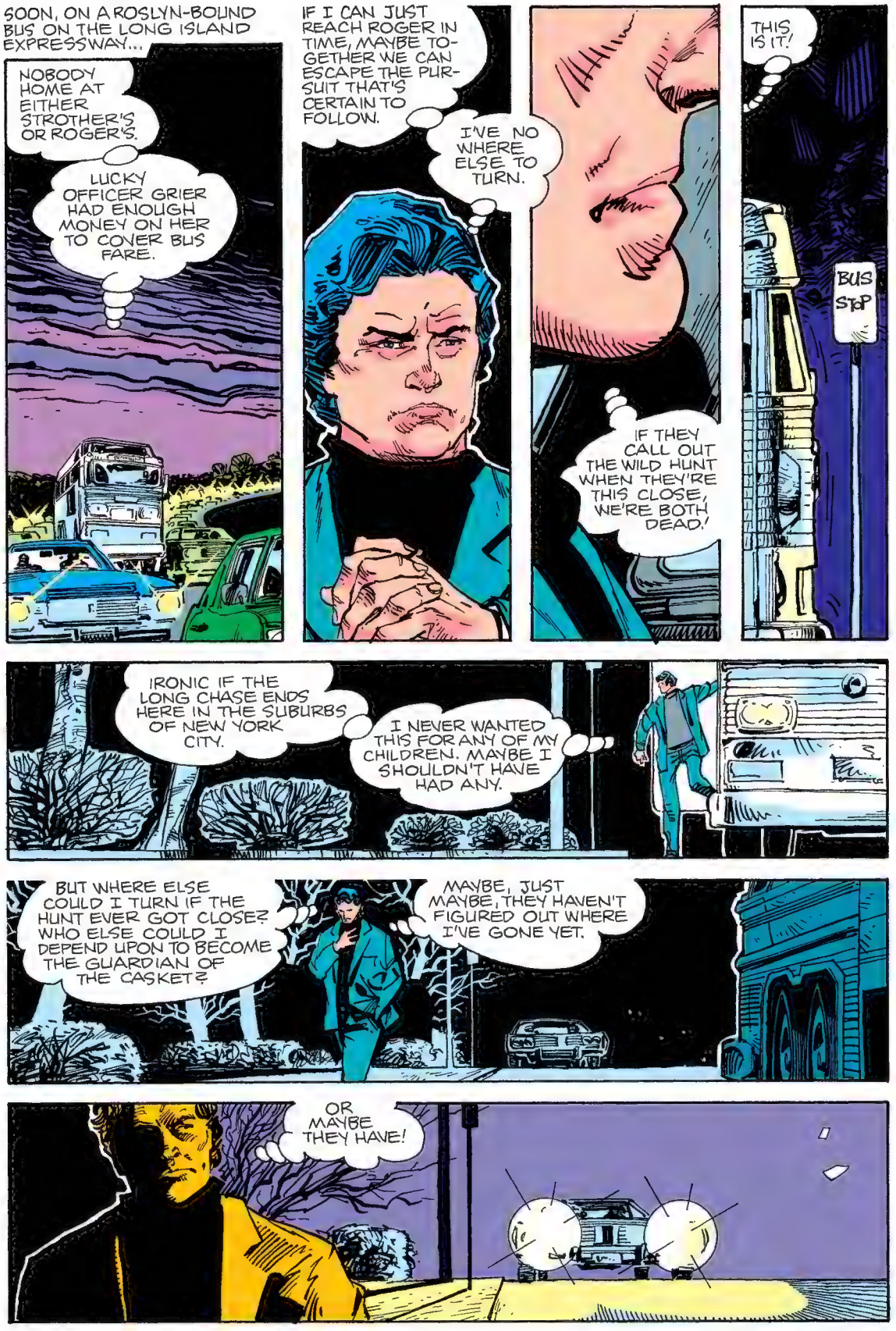

LATE AFTERNOON. THE LAW OFFICES OF STROTHER AND MARTIN...
THAT WAS THE FULL REPORT, MR. STROTHER. APPARENTLY DR. WILLIS WAS ARRESTED ON SUSPICION OF MURDER.
BUT WE HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO TRACE HIS CURRENT WHEREABOUTS. NOBODY SEEMS TO KNOW WHERE HE'S BEING HELD.
I THINK WE'RE BEING GIVEN THE RUNAROUND.
I SEE. THANK YOU, MISS BLUM.
I NEED A PACKAGE DELIVERED TO LONG ISLAND AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, TO DR. WILLIS'S FATHER.
HOLD ALL MY CALLS AND PHONE THE MESSENGER SERVICE IMMEDIATELY.
ERIC, MY OLD FRIEND, WE BOTH HOPED I WOULD NEVER NEED TO OPEN THE Q-FILE. BUT I THINK WE BOTH KNEW THE DAY MIGHT COME.
AND NOW IT HAS.
I WILL OBEY YOUR INSTRUCTIONS TO THE LETTER AND PRAY THAT I'M NOT TOO LATE.

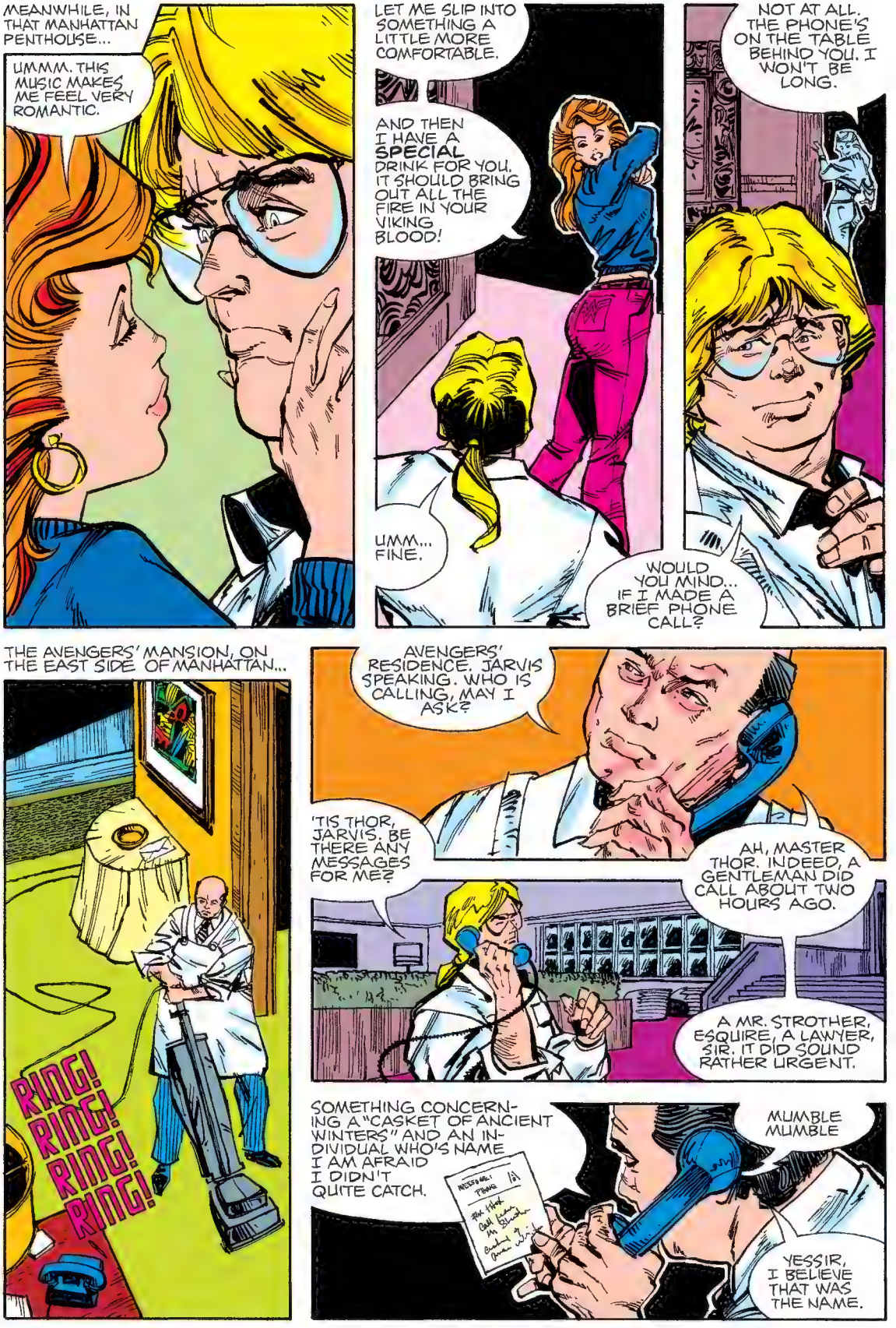

MEANWHILE, IN A FAR DISTANT CORNER OF THE FABULOUS REALM OF ASGARD, DEEP IN THE VAST WASTES...
HOME, NOBLE SILVERHOOF, HOME! YOU HAVE SERVED ME WELL AND SHOULD NOT SHARE MY FATE.
SEEK AGAIN THE GREEN PASTURES OF ASGARD AND LIVE FREE...
...AS I NEVER SHALL.
I, WHO HAVE BROKEN ALL MY OATHS...
...WHO, AGAINST MY OWN WILL, TOOK THE LIVES OF COUNTLESS DEMONS...
...AND WHO, IN MY TRUST AS AN AMBASSADOR, SLEW THE ADOPTED SON OF ODIN, LOKI...
...WHEN I FAILED IN MY MISSION TO THAT WRETCHED GOD.*
*NOT THE WHOLE STORY, BUT A FAIR SUMMATION OF THOR #344!
...I HAVE COME TO THE VERY EDGE OF THE WORLD.
BEYOND THIS LAST MOUNTAINOUS BASTION OF THE NORN QUEEN'S KINGDOM LIE ONLY ENDLESS LEAGUES OF DESERT.
AND THERE SHALL THE FATE OF BALDER BE DECIDED.
DEATH! I, WHO HAVE ALREADY DIED BEFORE, WOULD GAZE UPON YOUR VISAGE ONCE MORE!
SO YOU SEEK DEATH, DO YOU, BALDER?
THEN LOOK NO FURTHER! MY SWORD WILL SEND YOU SWIFTLY INTO HELA'S WAITING ARMS!

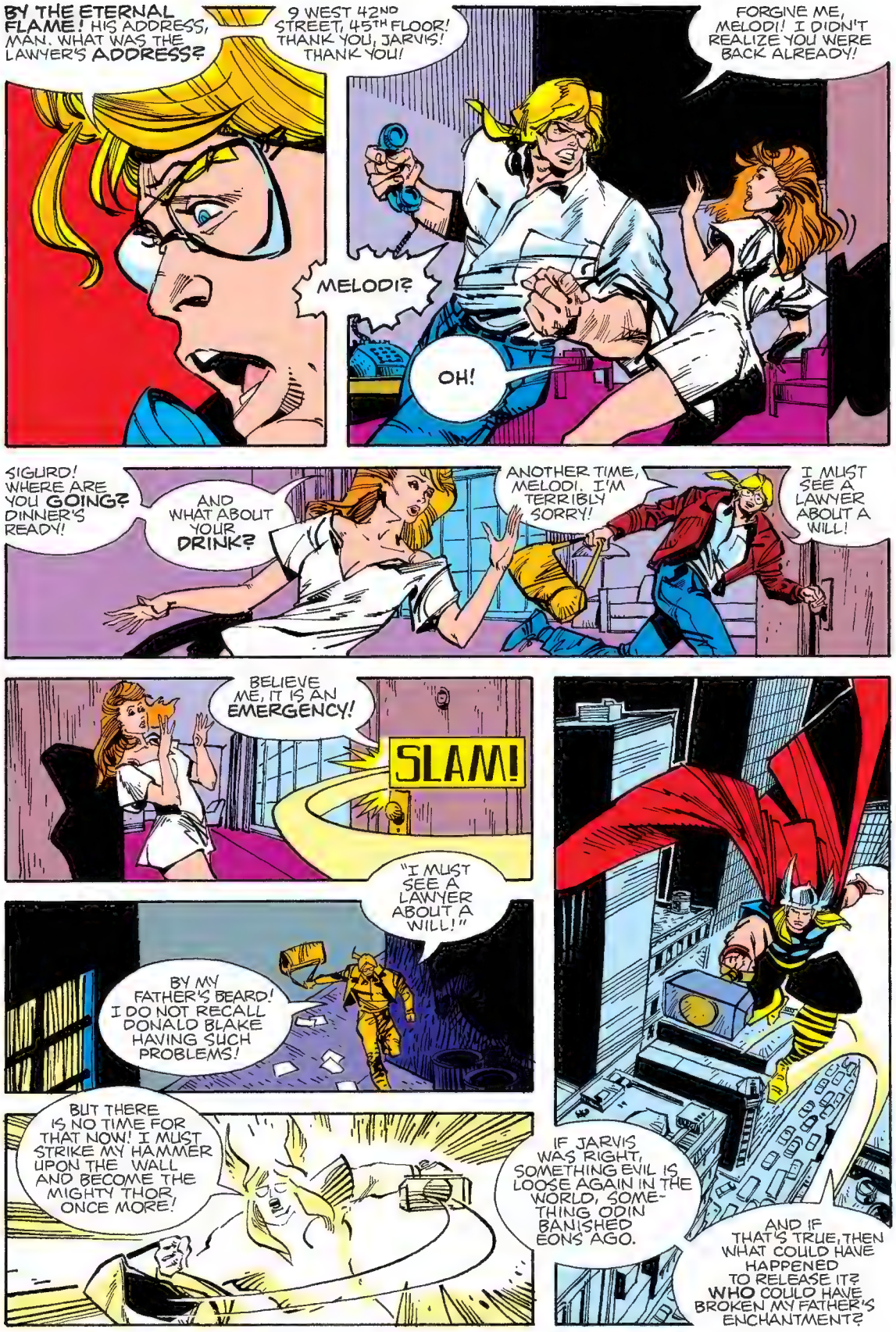

MANHATTAN, EARLY EVENING, IN A PENTHOUSE APARTMENT OVERLOOKING CENTRAL PARK...
HERE WE ARE, SIGURD.
JUST HANG YOUR JACKET IN THE CLOSET. DINNER WILL BE READY SHORTLY. WOULD YOU LIKE A DRINK?
NOT QUITE YET, MELODI, THANKS.
THEN COME AND SIT BESIDE ME. I NEVER THOUGHT I'D SEE ANYONE AS BRAVE AS YOU WERE WHEN YOU SAVED ME FROM THAT AWFUL DRAGON.*
*THOR #341.
IT...UH... IT WAS NOTHING. REALLY.
WELL, PERHAPS YOU SAVE GIRLS FROM DRAGONS EVERY DAY, BUT I NEVER MET ANYONE QUITE LIKE YOU BEFORE.
AND I WANT TO LET YOU KNOW JUST HOW MUCH I APPRECIATE IT.
I WANT TO MAKE THIS EVENING... PERFECT...
...FOR BOTH OF US.

MEANWHILE, IN ROSLYN, LONG ISLAND, A MESSENGER FROM STROTHER AND MARTIN HEADS BACK INTO THE CITY...
...AND THE DOCUMENTS INSIDE A SEALED PACKET ARE PULLED INTO THE LIGHT FOR THE FIRST TIME.
"Dear Roger,
"If you are reading this now, it can only mean that I am at long last dead--or as good as dead.
"In which case, I can finally speak to you as I have never been able to and tell you who I am and what I have done.
"I know that things have never been well between us, that the barriers I have had to erect around my life prevented me from being there when you needed me.
"But I know, too, that you have become the kind of man who will see what must be done... and do it. And I am proud of you for it.
"The enclosed papers explain everything. Study them well, and destroy them.
"I am handing over to you the greatest trust the human race has ever known.
"I have guarded it with my life.
"Now you must guard it with your own.
LONG ISLAND RAILROAD NEW YORK CITY
"Your loving father."

ELSEWHERE, IN A CELL IN MANHATTAN...
ANYTIME NOW, THEY'LL COME FOR ME, AND WHEN THEY DO, I'LL TELL THEM EVERYTHING.
I'LL BE FORCED TO EVEN IF I DON'T EAT THE FOOD.
IF ONLY-- WHAT'S THIS?
A FRENCH FRY! THE ONE I DROPPED THIS MORNING! MAYBE I'VE GOT A CHANCE AFTER ALL.
FIRST, I'LL GET RID OF THESE COOKIES.
SHORTLY...
I SEE YOU'VE EATEN YOUR SNACK. EXCELLENT. STAND UP AND COME OVER HERE.
NOW THAT YOU'RE ONE OF US, PERHAPS YOU FEEL LIKE TALKING.
I...I DON'T KNOW WHERE TO BEGIN.
WHY NOT START WITH THE CASKET'S LOCATION.
I'D RATHER START WITH BREAKFAST! I HAD FRIES!
WHAT?!
HERE, TRY ONE! THEY'RE DELICIOUS!
MUMPH!
FAWHAAHH!
GONE! JUST LIKE ALL OF THEM! AND NOTHING LEFT BUT THE CLOTHES OFF HER BACK...
...ALONG WITH MY TICKET OUT OF HERE!


SOON, ON A ROSLYN-BOUND BUS ON THE LONG ISLAND EXPRESSWAY...
NOBODY HOME AT EITHER STROTHER'S OR ROGER'S.
LUCKY OFFICER GRIER HAD ENOUGH MONEY ON HER TO COVER BUS FARE.
IF I CAN JUST REACH ROGER IN TIME, MAYBE TOGETHER WE CAN ESCAPE THE PURSUIT THAT'S CERTAIN TO FOLLOW.
I'VE NO WHERE ELSE TO TURN.
IF THEY CALL OUT THE WILD HUNT WHEN THEY'RE THIS CLOSE, WE'RE BOTH DEAD!
THIS IS IT!
BUS STOP
IRONIC IF THE LONG CHASE ENDS HERE IN THE SUBURBS OF NEW YORK CITY.
I NEVER WANTED THIS FOR ANY OF MY CHILDREN. MAYBE I SHOULDN'T HAVE HAD ANY.
BUT WHERE ELSE COULD I TURN IF THE HUNT EVER GOT CLOSE? WHO ELSE COULD I DEPEND UPON TO BECOME THE GUARDIAN OF THE CASKET?
MAYBE, JUST MAYBE, THEY HAVEN'T FIGURED OUT WHERE I'VE GONE YET.
OR MAYBE THEY HAVE!


MEANWHILE, IN THAT MANHATTAN PENTHOUSE...
UMMM. THIS MUSIC MAKES ME FEEL VERY ROMANTIC.
LET ME SLIP INTO SOMETHING A LITTLE MORE COMFORTABLE.
AND THEN I HAVE A SPECIAL DRINK FOR YOU. IT SHOULD BRING OUT ALL THE FIRE IN YOUR VIKING BLOOD!
UMM... FINE.
NOT AT ALL. THE PHONE'S ON THE TABLE BEHIND YOU. I WON'T BE LONG.
WOULD YOU MIND... IF I MADE A BRIEF PHONE CALL?
THE AVENGERS' MANSION, ON THE EAST SIDE OF MANHATTAN...
RING! RING! RING! RING!
AVENGERS' RESIDENCE. JARVIS SPEAKING. WHO IS CALLING, MAY I ASK?
'TIS THOR, JARVIS. BE THERE ANY MESSAGES FOR ME?
AH, MASTER THOR. INDEED, A GENTLEMAN DID CALL ABOUT TWO HOURS AGO.
A MR. STROTHER, ESQUIRE, A LAWYER, SIR. IT DID SOUND RATHER URGENT.
SOMETHING CONCERNING A "CASKET OF ANCIENT WINTERS" AND AN INDIVIDUAL WHO'S NAME I AM AFRAID I DIDN'T QUITE CATCH.
MUMBLE MUMBLE
YESSIR, I BELIEVE THAT WAS THE NAME.


BY THE ETERNAL FLAME! HIS ADDRESS, MAN. WHAT WAS THE LAWYER'S ADDRESS?
9 WEST 42ND STREET, 45TH FLOOR! THANK YOU, JARVIS! THANK YOU!
FORGIVE ME, MELODI! I DIDN'T REALIZE YOU WERE BACK ALREADY!
MELODI?
OH!
SIGURD! WHERE ARE YOU GOING? DINNER'S READY!
AND WHAT ABOUT YOUR DRINK?
ANOTHER TIME, MELODI. I'M TERRIBLY SORRY!
I MUST SEE A LAWYER ABOUT A WILL!
BELIEVE ME, IT IS AN EMERGENCY!
SLAM!
"I MUST SEE A LAWYER ABOUT A WILL!"
BY MY FATHER'S BEARD! I DO NOT RECALL DONALD BLAKE HAVING SUCH PROBLEMS!
BUT THERE IS NO TIME FOR THAT NOW! I MUST STRIKE MY HAMMER UPON THE WALL AND BECOME THE MIGHTY THOR, ONCE MORE!
IF JARVIS WAS RIGHT, SOMETHING EVIL IS LOOSE AGAIN IN THE WORLD, SOMETHING ODIN BANISHED EONS AGO.
AND IF THAT'S TRUE, THEN WHAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED TO RELEASE IT? WHO COULD HAVE BROKEN MY FATHER'S ENCHANTMENT?

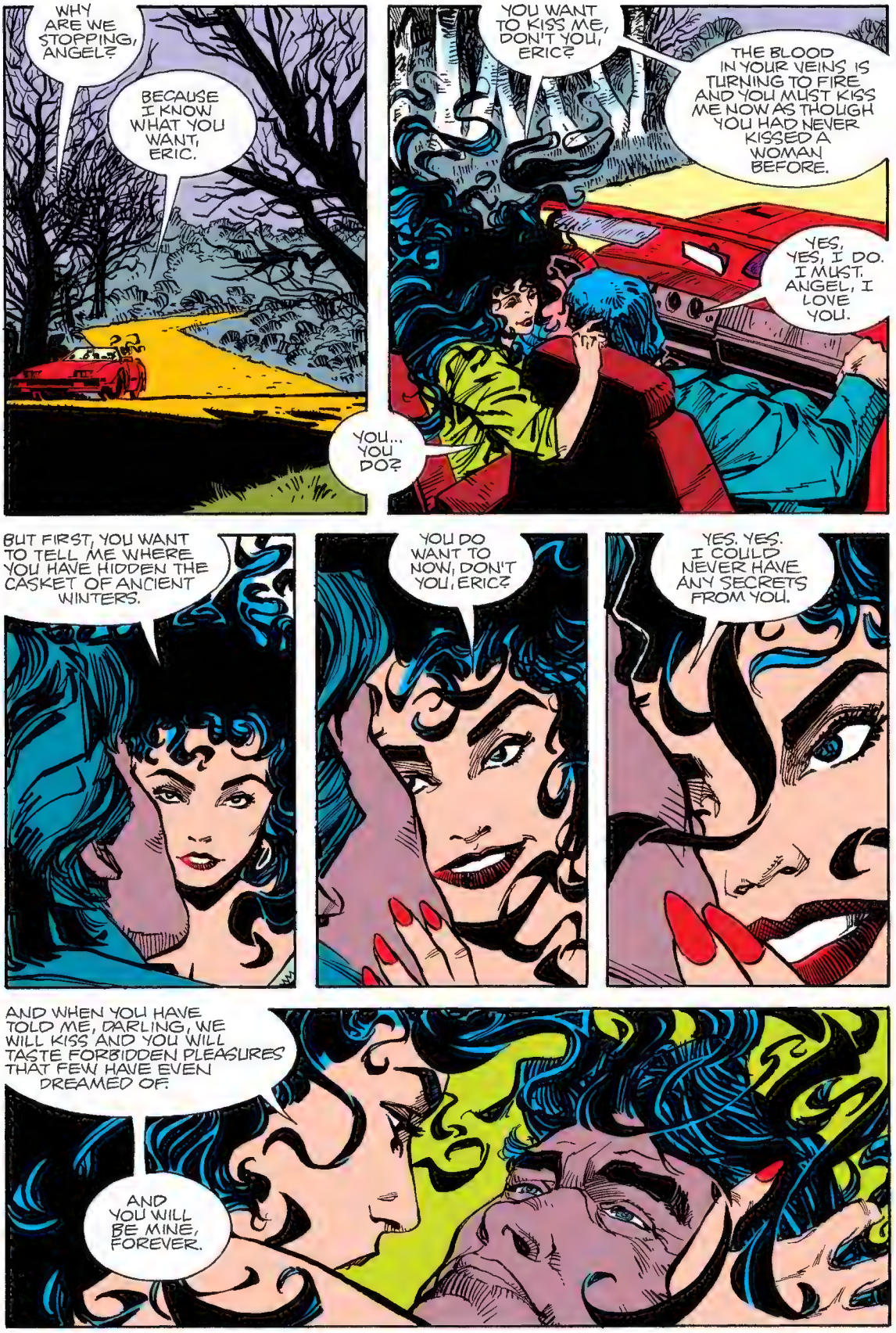
ROSLYN...
I WAS RIGHT. THE CAR IS FOLLOWING ME. PLAYING CAT AND MOUSE RIGHT NOW TO SHAKE ME UP.
AND THERE'S NOT EVEN A DOG-WALKER OUT TONIGHT!
MAYBE IF I CUT DOWN THIS SIDE STREET, I'LL BE ABLE TO LOSE THEM.
ANOTHER ONE!
THAT TEARS IT!
I'LL HAVE TO CUT BETWEEN THESE HOUSES AND HOPE I CAN GIVE THEM THE SLIP BEFORE THEY GET ANY CLOSER!
DON'T LET HIM GET AWAY.
IT'LL BE THE WILD HUNT FOR US IF HE ESCAPES AGAIN!
SPLIT UP AND CUT HIM OFF!

THEY'VE SEPARATED! THIS IS MY CHANCE!
KRAKK!
UGGH!
WHAT WAS THAT? OVER BEYOND THOSE BUSHES!
THERE HE IS!
NO GOOD! THERE ARE TOO MANY OF THEM...
...ALTHOUGH HERE'S ONE WHO WON'T BE SINGING IN CHOIR TOMORROW!
THAKK!
BETTER DOUBLE BACK.
MAYBE I CAN WORK MY WAY AROUND TO ONE OF THOSE CARS AND STEAL IT.
TOO LATE! HERE COMES THE PACK!

AFTER HIM ON FOOT!
WE'LL GET THE CARS!
THIS COULD BE IT!
IF I DON'T OUT-DISTANCE THOSE GOONS ON FOOT BEFORE THE CARS CATCH ME, I'LL NEVER ESCAPE!
WHAT?!!
SCREECH
GET IN, MISTER!
I--!
HURRY! THEY'RE ALMOST HERE!
IT'S A GIRL!
LOOK OUT! SOMEBODY'S PICKING HIM UP!
GRAB THE FENDER!
I'M IN! GUN IT!
I CAN'T MAKE IT!
UGHH!
WHARROOOOOOOM!
DON'T WORRY! THEY'LL NEVER CATCH US NOW!
MISS, I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE, BUT YOU SURE ARE A LIFE-SAVER.
JUST CALL ME ANGEL. AND IT WAS MY PLEASURE. I DIDN'T LIKE THE ODDS AND THAT WAS A PRETTY SCRUFFY LOT YOU WERE RUNNING FROM.
PEOPLE IN DISTRESS ARE MY SPECIALTY!

MEANWHILE, IN MANHATTAN...
YONDER IS THE LAWYER'S OFFICE. AND THE LIGHT IS STILL ON.
EXCELLENT.
THE CASKET OF ANCIENT WINTERS WAS THOUGHT LOST EONS AGO, EVEN BEFORE MY FATHER BANISHED ITS KEEPER BEYOND THE STARS.
IF IT HAS BEEN UNEARTHED AT LONG LAST, THEN SURELY SOME ANCIENT EVIL HAS COME TO MIDGARD.*
I FEEL AS THOUGH A STORM LONG IN THE MAKING IS ABOUT TO BREAK.
GOOD. THE WINDOW IS UNLOCKED.
*EARTH.
WHO--? AH, THOR. THEN YOU DID GET MY MESSAGE.
I HAVE COME ON THE WINGS OF THE WIND, MR. STROTHER.
FOR THE WORD YOU SPOKE TO JARVIS IN YOUR CALL STILL ECHOES ACROSS THE CENTURIES AND IF YOU HAVE TIDINGS TO TELL ME, THEY HAD BEST BE SAID QUICKLY.
TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE.
MANKIND HAS FEW ENEMIES AS DEADLY AS THIS ONE AND NONE THAT SURPASS THE DARK ELF IN VILLAINY.
YOU HAVE SPOKEN THE NAME OF MALEKITH THE ACCURSED!

MEANWHILE, IN ROSLYN...
I CAN'T BELIEVE HOW RELAXED I FEEL, ESPECIALLY AFTER SUCH A NARROW ESCAPE.
AND THAT MUSIC ON THE RADIO. IT SEEMS TO FLOW RIGHT THROUGH ME. WHAT STATION IS THAT?
IT IS MUSIC TO SOOTH THE SOUL. TO HELP A PERSON GENTLY SAIL AWAY ON THE WINGS OF DREAMS.
IT'S STRANGE, ANGEL. I FEEL SO AT PEACE WITH YOU, AS IF I'VE KNOWN YOU ALL MY LIFE.
WE'VE... WE'VE NEVER MET BEFORE, HAVE WE?
PERHAPS WE HAVE, ERIC, IN DREAMS.
I HAVE BEEN WAITING TO MEET YOU FOR A LONG TIME.
AND YOU HAVE BEEN WAITING TO MEET ME.
I...I HAVE?
BUT NOW THAT I LOOK AT YOU, I...I THINK YOU'RE RIGHT.
THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT YOU THAT'S FAMILIAR.
MAYBE IT'S THE MUSIC. IT'S WEAVING THROUGH MY BRAIN. I CAN'T SEEM TO HOLD ONTO MY THOUGHTS...
...BUT I'VE NEVER SEEN A WOMAN MORE BEAUTIFUL.


WHY ARE WE STOPPING, ANGEL?
BECAUSE I KNOW WHAT YOU WANT, ERIC.
YOU WANT TO KISS ME, DON'T YOU, ERIC?
THE BLOOD IN YOUR VEINS IS TURNING TO FIRE AND YOU MUST KISS ME NOW AS THOUGH YOU HAD NEVER KISSED A WOMAN BEFORE.
YES, YES, I DO. I MUST. ANGEL, I LOVE YOU.
YOU... YOU DO?
BUT FIRST, YOU WANT TO TELL ME WHERE YOU HAVE HIDDEN THE CASKET OF ANCIENT WINTERS.
YOU DO WANT TO NOW, DON'T YOU, ERIC?
YES. YES. I COULD NEVER HAVE ANY SECRETS FROM YOU.
AND WHEN YOU HAVE TOLD ME, DARLING, WE WILL KISS AND YOU WILL TASTE FORBIDDEN PLEASURES THAT FEW HAVE EVEN DREAMED OF.
AND YOU WILL BE MINE, FOREVER.

ELSEWHERE, FAR BEYOND THE FIELDS WE KNOW, A MIGHTY HOST SWAYS IN ECSTASY AND A GREAT VOICE FILLS THE BURNING VOID...
THE SHEATHLESS SWORD IS FINISHED!
THE ANVIL'S WORK IS DONE!
NOW SHALL I STRIKE THE SECOND BLOW AGAINST ASGARD AND ALL HER POWER!
DOOM!

AND, BACK IN ROSLYN...
ERIC, MY LOVE, THAT WAS BEAUTIFUL.
I RARELY MEET A SOUL SO DEVOTED TO DUTY.
WHICH IS PRECISELY WHY THEY ARE SO DELICIOUS.
BUT OF COURSE, IT COULD END NO OTHER WAY.
NOW MY EAGER SERVANTS WILL SEEK OUT YOUR SON AND DESTROY THE LAST TRACES OF YOUR KNOWLEDGE.
I, WHO PURSUED ODIN'S RAVEN TO THE VERY GATES OF ASGARD COULD HARDLY BE DENIED BY ANY MORTAL, NO MATTER HOW DEVOTED.
AND THE ISLAND OF MANHATTAN WILL YIELD UP MY ANCIENT TREASURE...
...FOR THE TIME HAS COME TO OPEN AND RELEASE ITS CONTENTS, AS MY LORD COMMANDS.
TOO LONG HAS MY GREATEST POSSESSION BEEN DENIED ME. TONIGHT, THE CASKET WILL BE MINE AT LAST EVEN IF I MUST CALL THE WILD HUNT ITSELF!
AND WOE TO THOSE...
...WHO STAND BETWEEN MALEKITH AND HIS GOAL!

CONFUSED? BEWILDERED? AFRAID TO EAT A McBURGER AGAIN? DON'T BE! ALL WILL BE EXPLAINED NEXT ISSUE (IF WE CAN FIGURE IT OUT IN TIME)!

NEXT: THE WILD HUNT!

MARVEL
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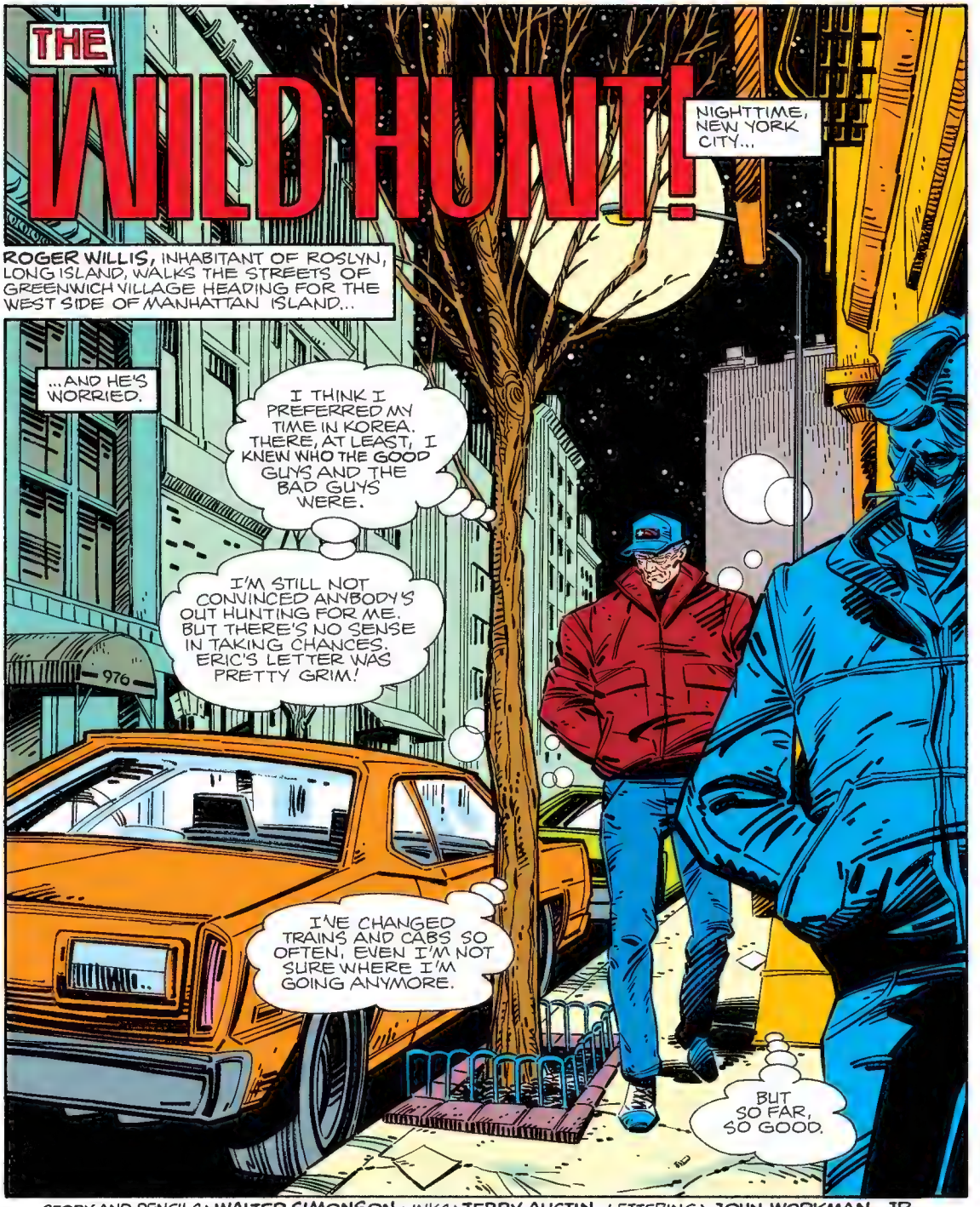
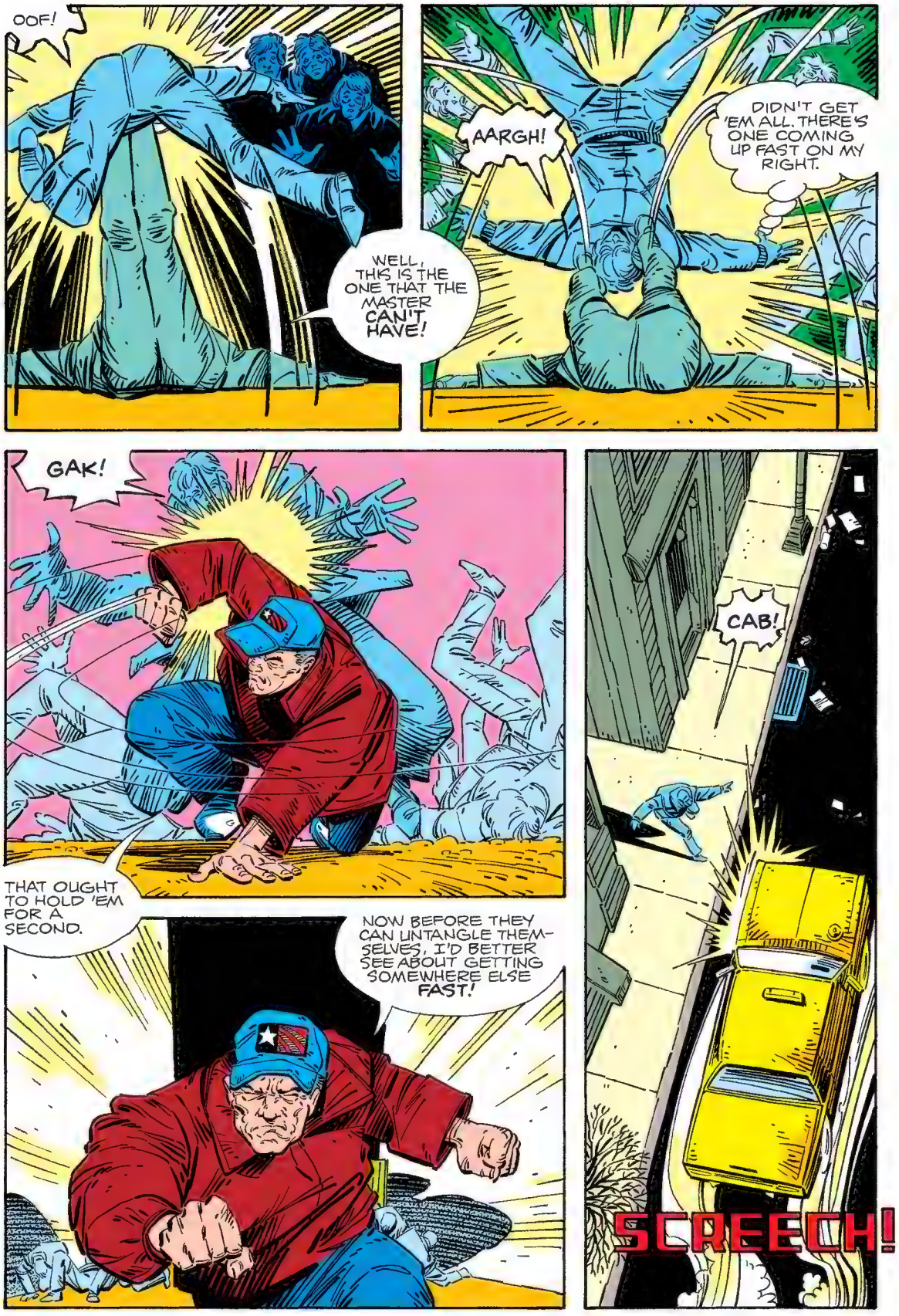
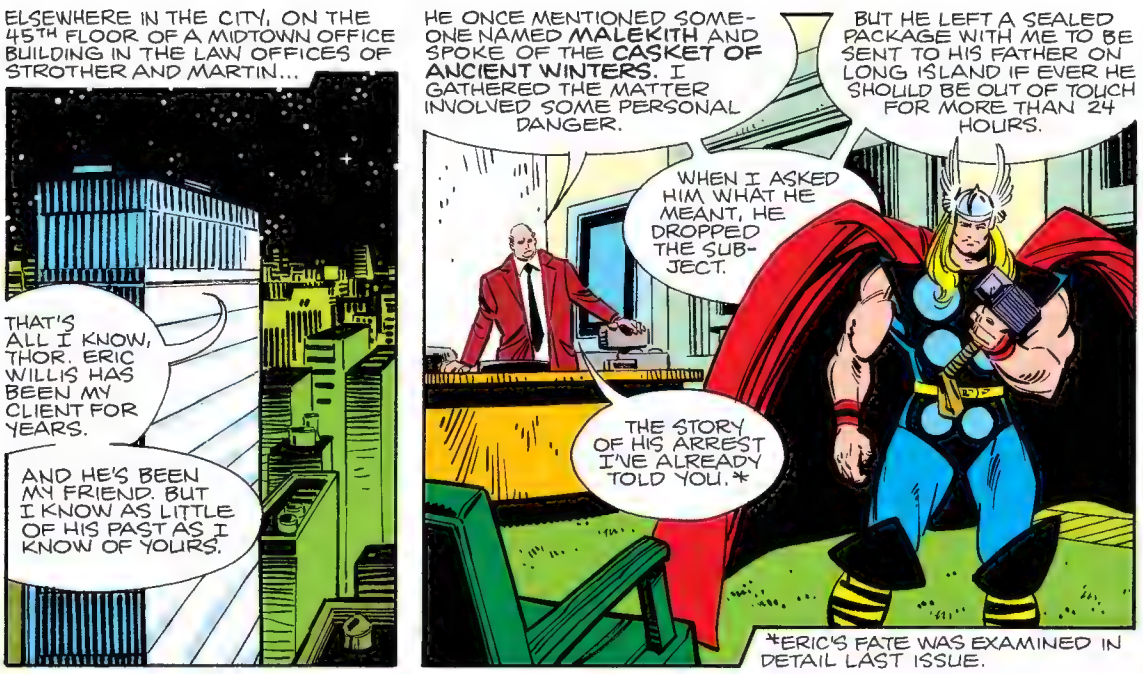
STAN LEE PRESENTS: the MIGHTY THOR®

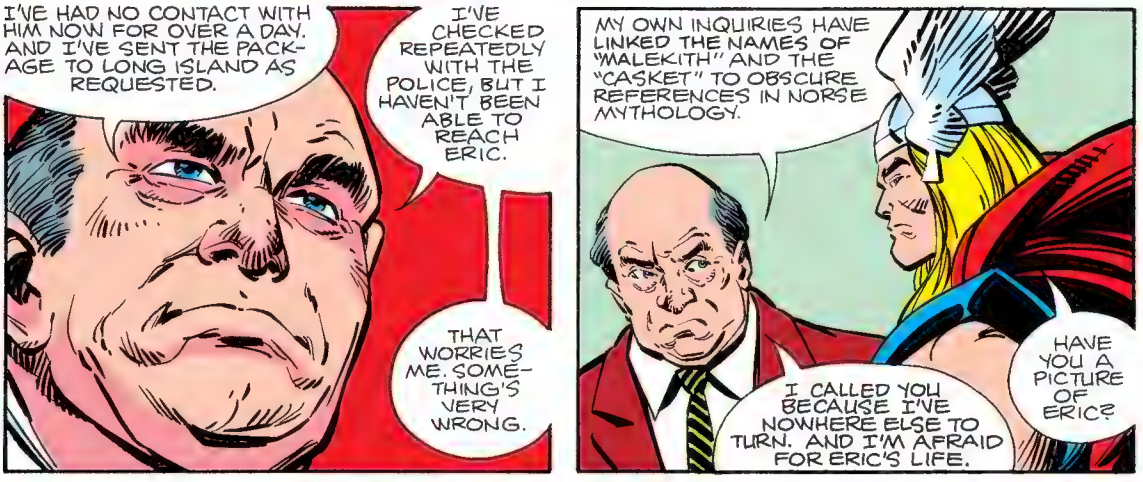

THE
WILD HUNT!
NIGHTTIME, NEW YORK CITY...
ROGER WILLIS, INHABITANT OF ROSLYN, LONG ISLAND, WALKS THE STREETS OF GREENWICH VILLAGE HEADING FOR THE WEST SIDE OF MANHATTAN ISLAND...
...AND HE'S WORRIED.
I THINK I PREFERRED MY TIME IN KOREA. THERE, AT LEAST, I KNEW WHO THE GOOD GUYS AND THE BAD GUYS WERE.
I'M STILL NOT CONVINCED ANYBODY'S OUT HUNTING FOR ME. BUT THERE'S NO SENSE IN TAKING CHANCES. ERIC'S LETTER WAS PRETTY GRIM!
976
I'VE CHANGED TRAINS AND CABS SO OFTEN, EVEN I'M NOT SURE WHERE I'M GOING ANYMORE.
BUT SO FAR, SO GOOD.

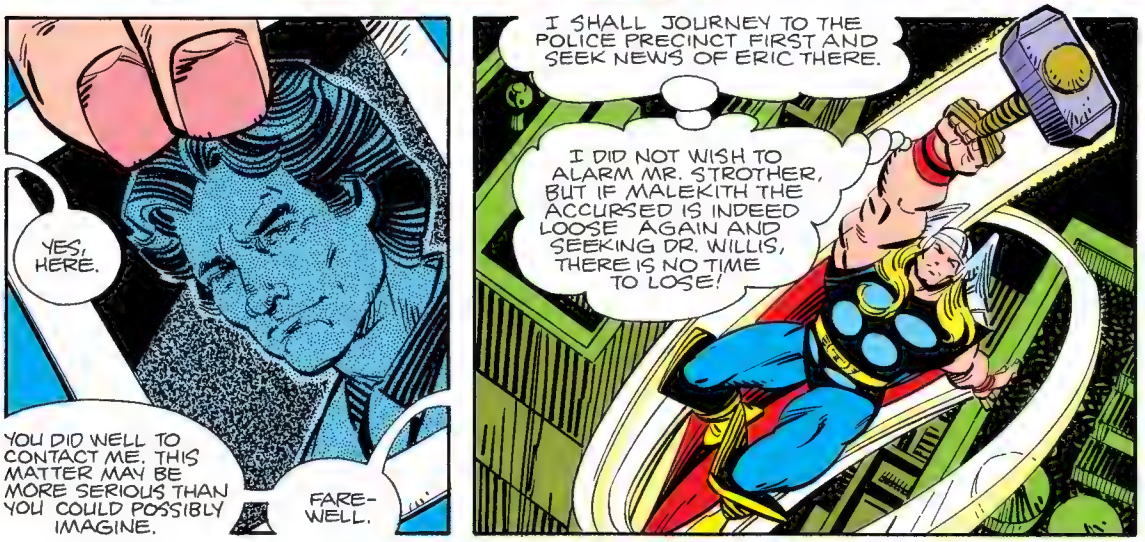
STORY AND PENCILS: WALTER SIMONSON • INKS: TERRY AUSTIN • LETTERING: JOHN WORKMAN, JR.
COLORING: CHRISTIE SCHEELE • EDITING: MARK GRUENWALD • EDITOR IN CHIEF: JIM SHOOTER

HEY, MAC!
WHAT?
GOTTA LIGHT?
OH, SURE.
KINDA WARM OUT TONIGHT, AIN'T IT?
YEAH, I GUESS SO.
IT'S ABOUT TO GET A LOT HOTTER!
WHA--!
GET HIM! THIS IS THE ONE THE MASTER WANTS!
UHHH!

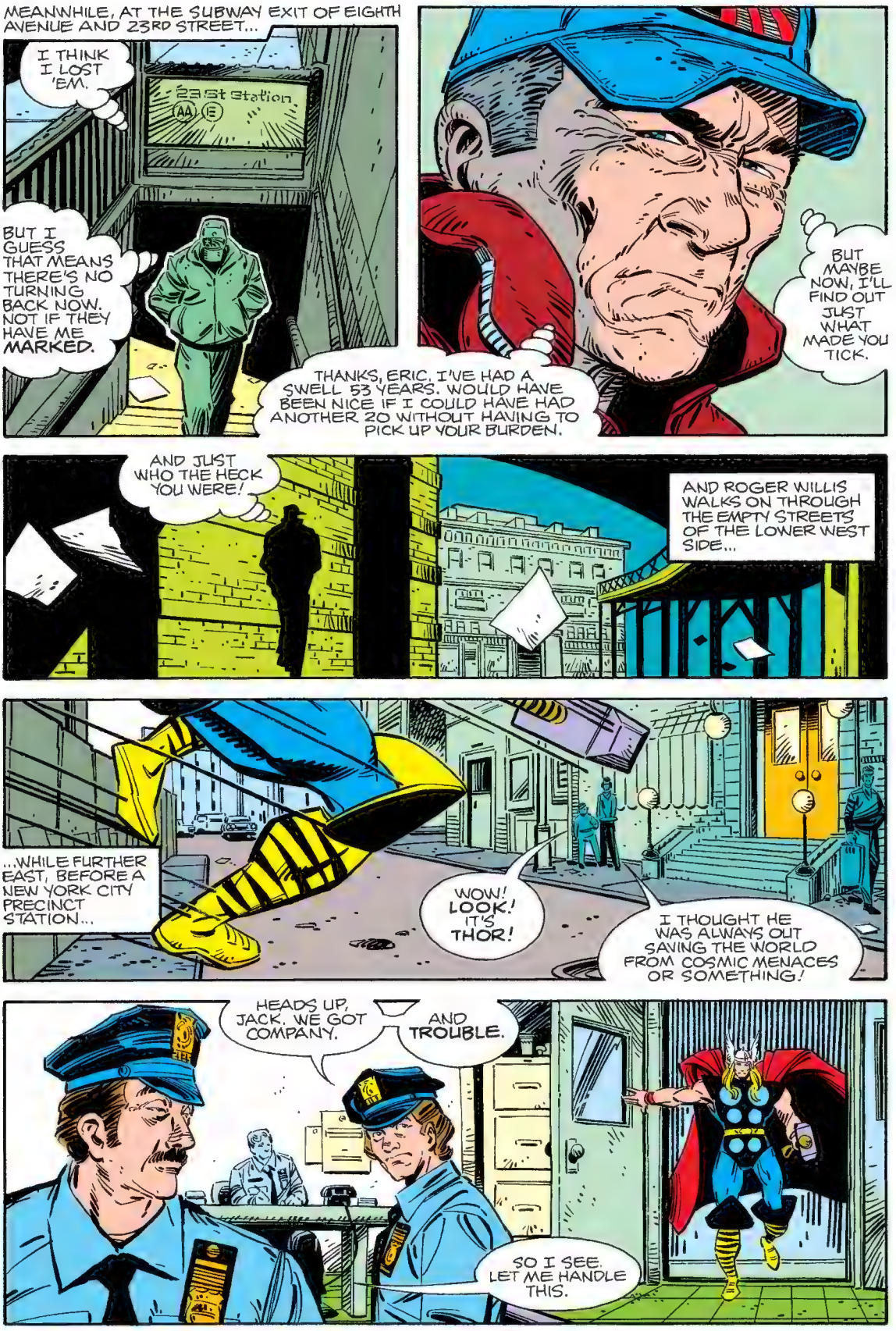

OOF!
WELL, THIS IS THE ONE THAT THE MASTER CAN'T HAVE!
AARGH!
DIDN'T GET 'EM ALL. THERE'S ONE COMING UP FAST ON MY RIGHT.
GAK!
THAT OUGHT TO HOLD 'EM FOR A SECOND.
NOW BEFORE THEY CAN UNTANGLE THEMSELVES, I'D BETTER SEE ABOUT GETTING SOMEWHERE ELSE FAST!
CAB!
SCREECH!


ELSEWHERE IN THE CITY, ON THE 45TH FLOOR OF A MIDTOWN OFFICE BUILDING IN THE LAW OFFICES OF STROTHER AND MARTIN...
THAT'S ALL I KNOW, THOR. ERIC WILLIS HAS BEEN MY CLIENT FOR YEARS.
AND HE'S BEEN MY FRIEND. BUT I KNOW AS LITTLE OF HIS PAST AS I KNOW OF YOURS.
HE ONCE MENTIONED SOMEONE NAMED MALEKITH AND SPOKE OF THE CASKET OF ANCIENT WINTERS. I GATHERED THE MATTER INVOLVED SOME PERSONAL DANGER.
BUT HE LEFT A SEALED PACKAGE WITH ME TO BE SENT TO HIS FATHER ON LONG ISLAND IF EVER HE SHOULD BE OUT OF TOUCH FOR MORE THAN 24 HOURS.
WHEN I ASKED HIM WHAT HE MEANT, HE DROPPED THE SUBJECT.
THE STORY OF HIS ARREST I'VE ALREADY TOLD YOU.*
*ERIC'S FATE WAS EXAMINED IN DETAIL LAST ISSUE.

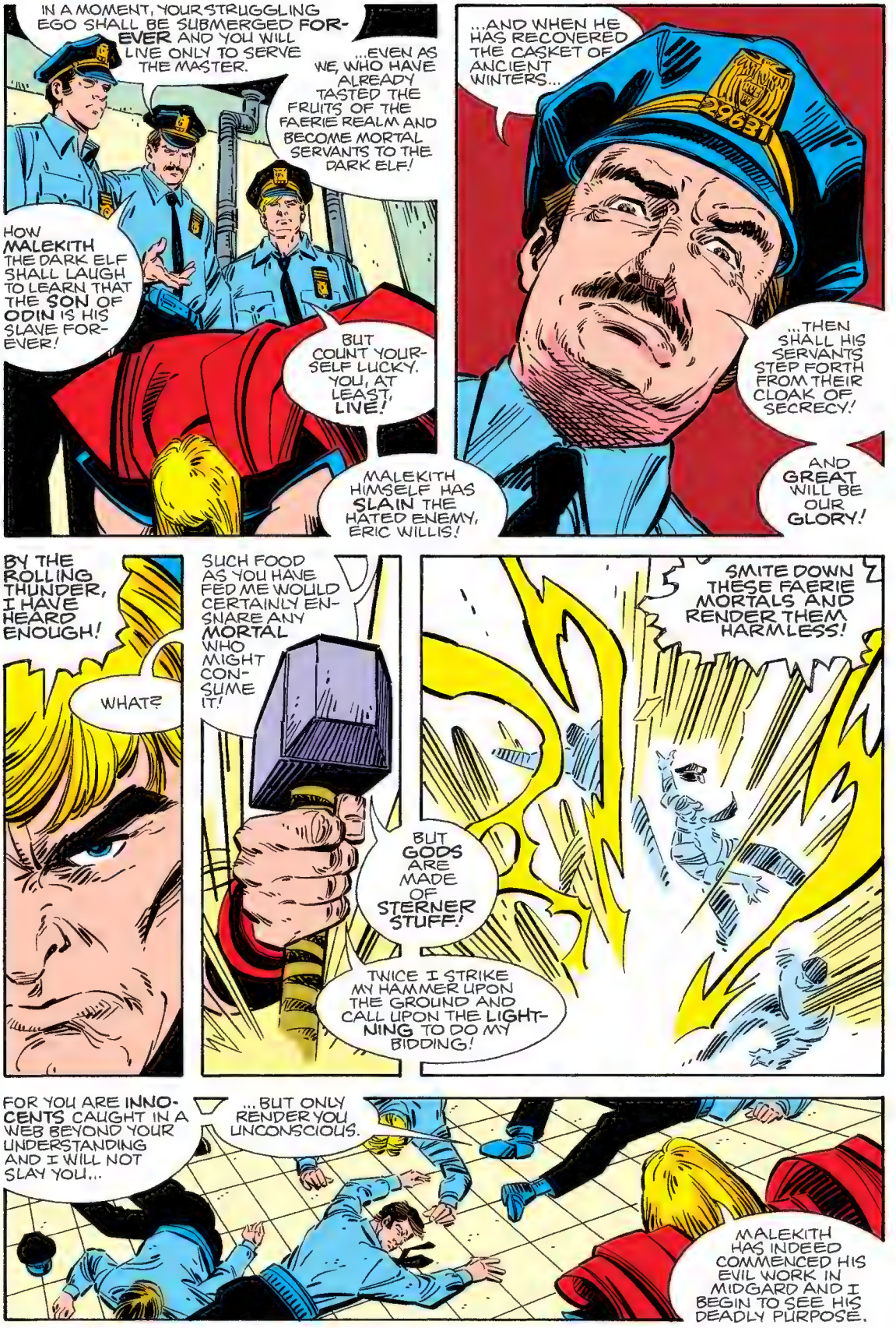

I'VE HAD NO CONTACT WITH HIM NOW FOR OVER A DAY. AND I'VE SENT THE PACKAGE TO LONG ISLAND AS REQUESTED.
I'VE CHECKED REPEATEDLY WITH THE POLICE, BUT I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO REACH ERIC.
THAT WORRIES ME. SOMETHING'S VERY WRONG.
MY OWN INQUIRIES HAVE LINKED THE NAMES OF "MALEKITH" AND THE "CASKET" TO OBSCURE REFERENCES IN NORSE MYTHOLOGY.
I CALLED YOU BECAUSE I'VE NOWHERE ELSE TO TURN. AND I'M AFRAID FOR ERIC'S LIFE.
HAVE YOU A PICTURE OF ERIC?

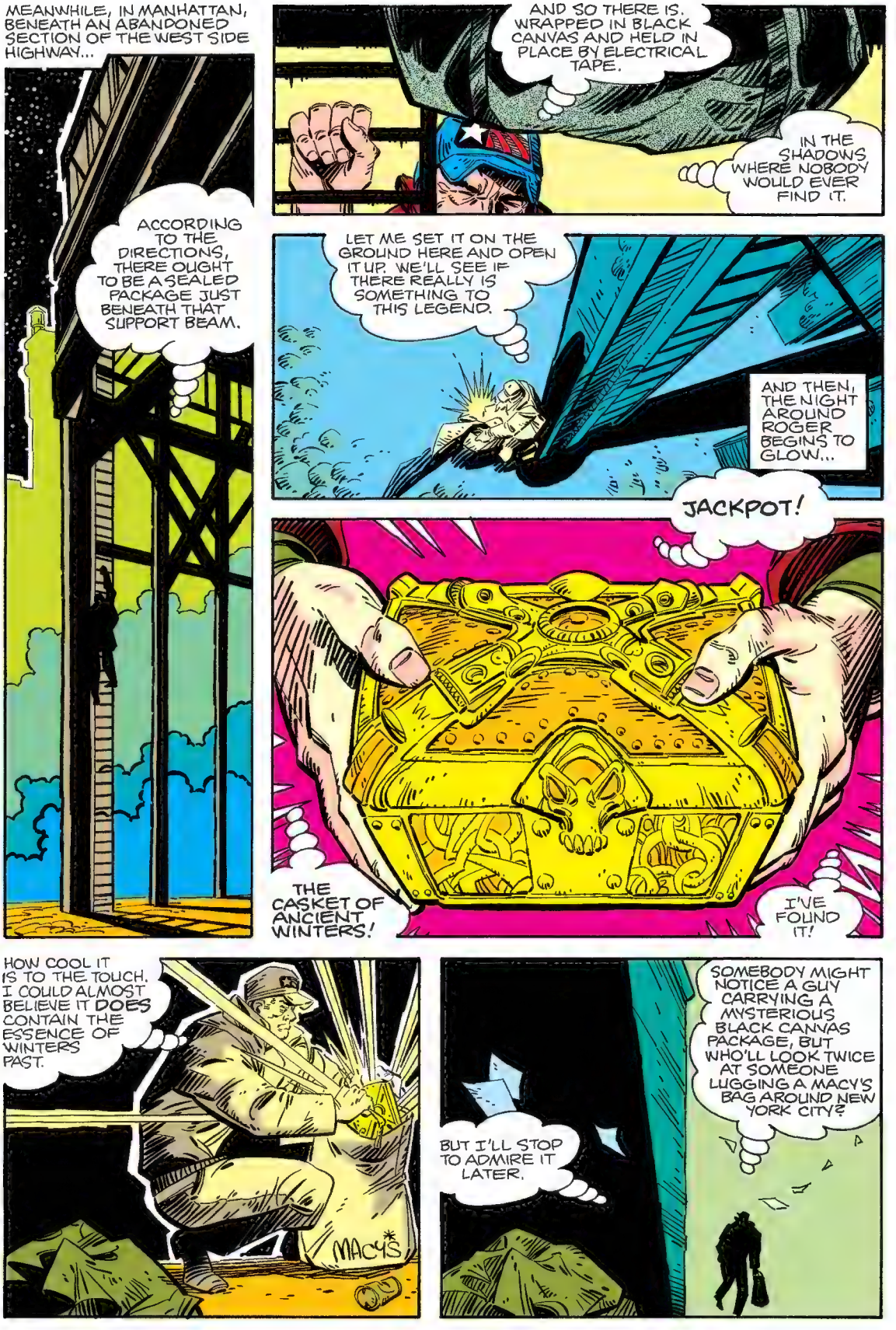

YES, HERE.
YOU DID WELL TO CONTACT ME. THIS MATTER MAY BE MORE SERIOUS THAN YOU COULD POSSIBLY IMAGINE.
FAREWELL.
I SHALL JOURNEY TO THE POLICE PRECINCT FIRST AND SEEK NEWS OF ERIC THERE.
I DID NOT WISH TO ALARM MR. STROTHER, BUT IF MALEKITH THE ACCURSED IS INDEED LOOSE AGAIN AND SEEKING DR. WILLIS, THERE IS NO TIME TO LOSE!

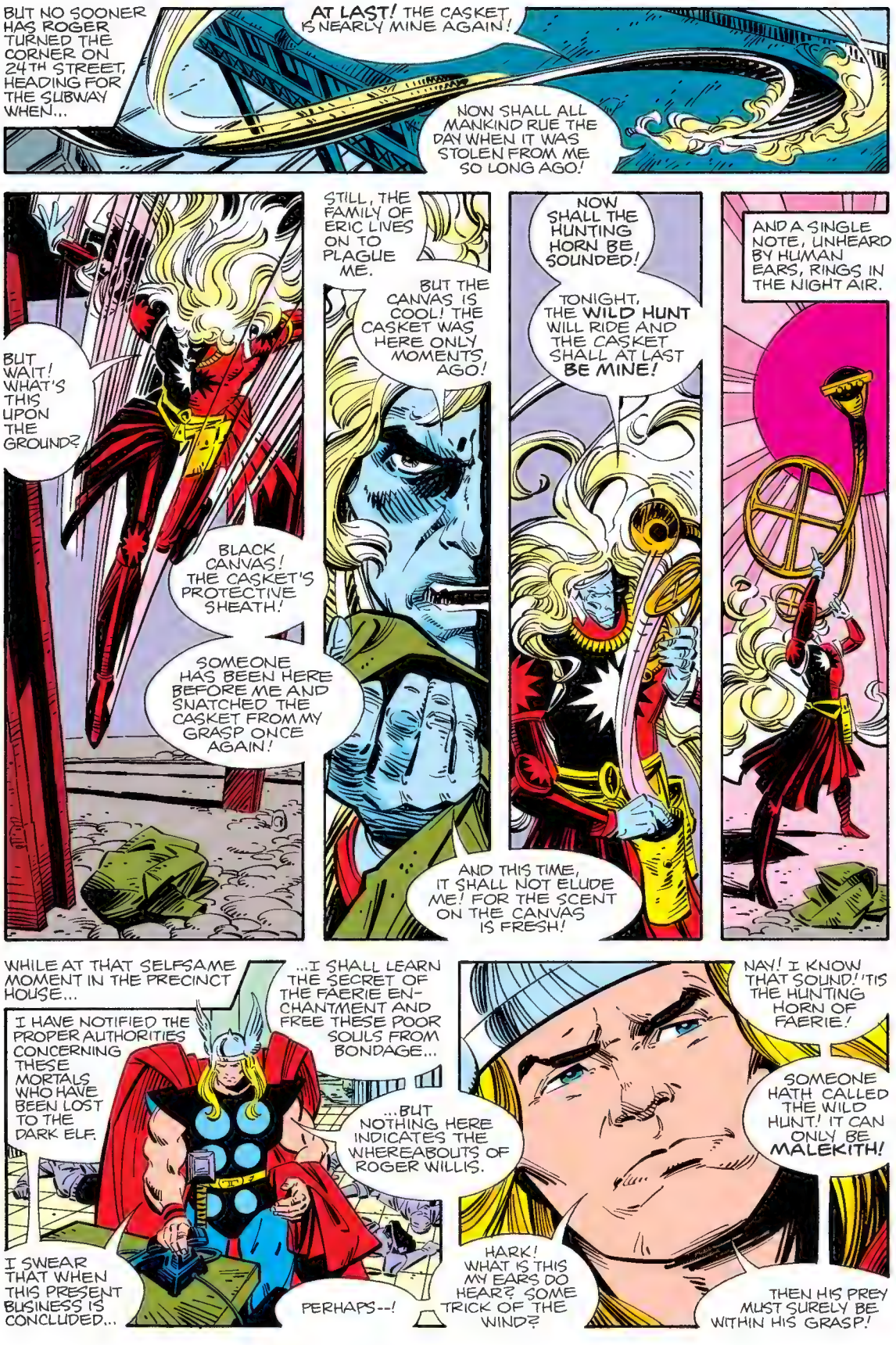
BUT AS THOR TAKES TO THE AIR, WE TURN TO A SINGLES BAR SOMEWHERE ON MANHATTAN'S WEST SIDE...
SHE'S THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN I'VE EVER SEEN.
HEY, DON'T CROWD, GUYS.
I SAW HER FIRST!
C'MON, GIVE US A BREAK!
AT LEAST TELL US YOUR PHONE NUMBER!
...TO FIND LORELEI, SEDUCTRESS OF ASGARD, SURROUNDING HERSELF WITH THE THINGS SHE LOVES BEST...
...MEN.
SORRY, LOVERS, BUT I BELONG TO ANOTHER.
I REALLY ONLY STOPPED IN TO ENJOY THE CONGENIAL ATMOSPHERE.
HEY, GUESS WHAT, GANG. I JUST SAW THE MIGHTY THOR SAIL BY HEADING EAST.
AA, SO WHAT? THAT BIG STIFF. I BET HE ISN'T NEARLY AS TOUGH AS THEY SAY HE IS.
WHY, CARY, FOR SHAME! THOR IS THE VERY MAN OF MY HEART.
YOU'RE KIDDING. HIM?
WERE I TO LIFT A FINGER, HE WOULD SATISFY MY EVERY WHIM.
OR RATHER, HE WILL, AS SOON AS HE HAS TASTED MY ENCHANTED MEAD.
PLEASING LORELEI WILL BE THE ONLY THING THAT MATTERS TO HIM THEN.
I THINK PERHAPS I'D BETTER MAKE A PHONE CALL.
THE MASTER MIGHT WANT TO KNOW ABOUT THIS.
WHILE IN THE SKIES ABOVE NEW YORK...
ACCORDING TO MR. STROTHER, YONDER IS THE PRECINCT STATION I SEEK.

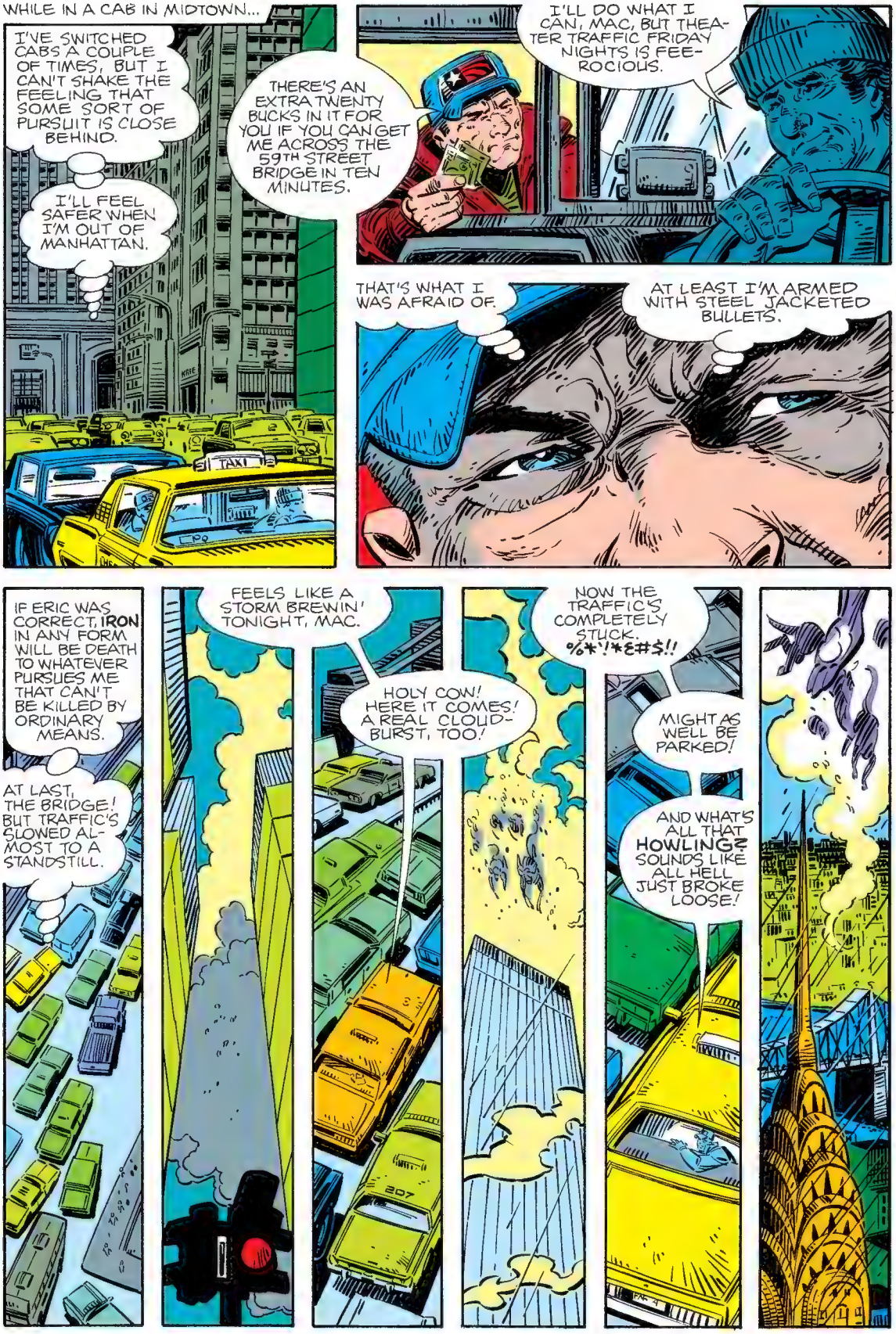

MEANWHILE, AT THE SUBWAY EXIT OF EIGHTH AVENUE AND 23RD STREET...
I THINK I LOST 'EM.
23 St Station
AA E
BUT I GUESS THAT MEANS THERE'S NO TURNING BACK NOW. NOT IF THEY HAVE ME MARKED.
THANKS, ERIC. I'VE HAD A SWELL 53 YEARS. WOULD HAVE BEEN NICE IF I COULD HAVE HAD ANOTHER 20 WITHOUT HAVING TO PICK UP YOUR BURDEN.
BUT MAYBE NOW, I'LL FIND OUT JUST WHAT MADE YOU TICK.
AND JUST WHO THE HECK YOU WERE!
AND ROGER WILLIS WALKS ON THROUGH THE EMPTY STREETS OF THE LOWER WEST SIDE...
...WHILE FURTHER EAST, BEFORE A NEW YORK CITY PRECINCT STATION...
WOW! LOOK! IT'S THOR!
I THOUGHT HE WAS ALWAYS OUT SAVING THE WORLD FROM COSMIC MENACES OR SOMETHING!
HEADS UP, JACK. WE GOT COMPANY.
AND TROUBLE.
SO I SEE. LET ME HANDLE THIS.

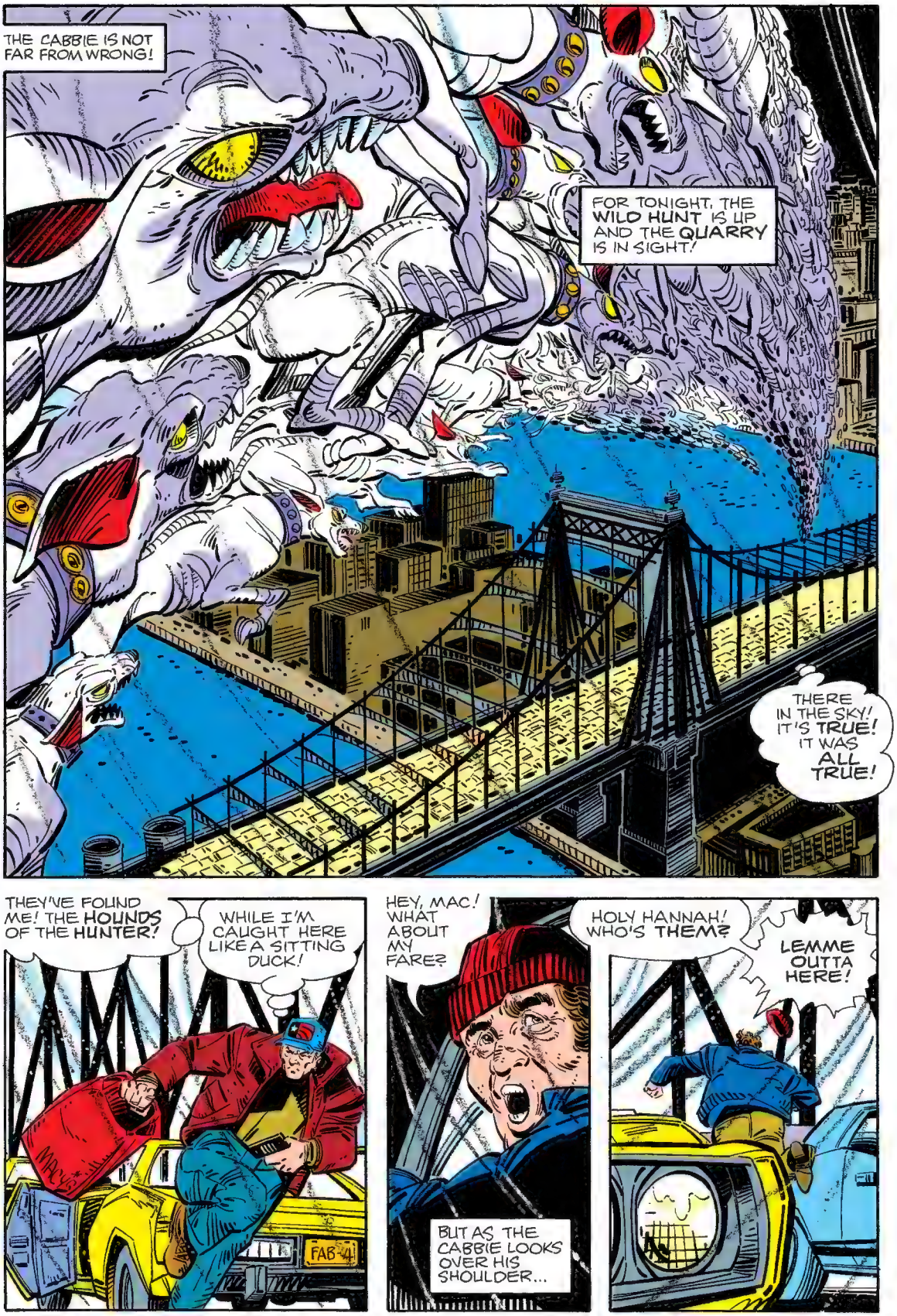
I SEEK THE MAN BROUGHT HERE EARLIER TODAY, DR. ERIC WILLIS.
CERTAINLY, THOR. WE'RE ALWAYS READY TO HELP ONE OF THE MIGHTY AVENGERS.
PLEASE, HAVE A SEAT, WE'LL BRING DR. WILLIS OUT TO YOU.
WHILE YOU WAIT, WON'T YOU HAVE SOME COOKIES? THEY'RE A VERY SPECIAL TREAT OF THE STATION.
THEY ARE DELICIOUS. I HAVE NEVER TASTED ANYTHING QUITE LIKE THEM BEFORE.
EVERYONE HERE HAS ENJOYED THEM.
PERHAPS NOT. BUT THEY WILL BE ALL YOU EVER TASTE FROM NOW UNTIL THE END OF TIME.
WHAT?
IS YOUR STRENGTH EBBING? YOUR HAMMER BECOMING TOO GREAT A WEIGHT EVEN FOR YOU TO BEAR?
EVEN NOW, YOUR KNEES BEGIN TO BUCKLE AND YOU CANNOT REMAIN IN YOUR CHAIR.
MY LIMBS GROW WEAK! I CANNOT STAND!
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO ME?
I HAVE MADE YOU ONE OF US! YOU HAVE TASTED THE ENCHANTED FOOD OF FAERIE AND NO LONGER IS YOUR WILL YOUR OWN!
I... I CANNOT RISE!


IN A MOMENT, YOUR STRUGGLING EGO SHALL BE SUBMERGED FOREVER AND YOU WILL LIVE ONLY TO SERVE THE MASTER.
...EVEN AS WE, WHO HAVE ALREADY TASTED THE FRUITS OF THE FAERIE REALM AND BECOME MORTAL SERVANTS TO THE DARK ELF!
HOW MALEKITH THE DARK ELF SHALL LAUGH TO LEARN THAT THE SON OF ODIN IS HIS SLAVE FOREVER!
BUT COUNT YOURSELF LUCKY. YOU, AT LEAST, LIVE!
MALEKITH HIMSELF HAS SLAIN THE HATED ENEMY, ERIC WILLIS!
...AND WHEN HE HAS RECOVERED THE CASKET OF ANCIENT WINTERS...
...THEN SHALL HIS SERVANTS STEP FORTH FROM THEIR CLOAK OF SECRECY!
AND GREAT WILL BE OUR GLORY!
BY THE ROLLING THUNDER, I HAVE HEARD ENOUGH!
WHAT?
SUCH FOOD AS YOU HAVE FED ME WOULD CERTAINLY ENSNARE ANY MORTAL WHO MIGHT CONSUME IT!
BUT GODS ARE MADE OF STERNER STUFF!
TWICE I STRIKE MY HAMMER UPON THE GROUND AND CALL UPON THE LIGHTNING TO DO MY BIDDING!
SMITE DOWN THESE FAERIE MORTALS AND RENDER THEM HARMLESS!
FOR YOU ARE INNOCENTS CAUGHT IN A WEB BEYOND YOUR UNDERSTANDING AND I WILL NOT SLAY YOU...
...BUT ONLY RENDER YOU UNCONSCIOUS.
MALEKITH HAS INDEED COMMENCED HIS EVIL WORK IN MIDGARD AND I BEGIN TO SEE HIS DEADLY PURPOSE.

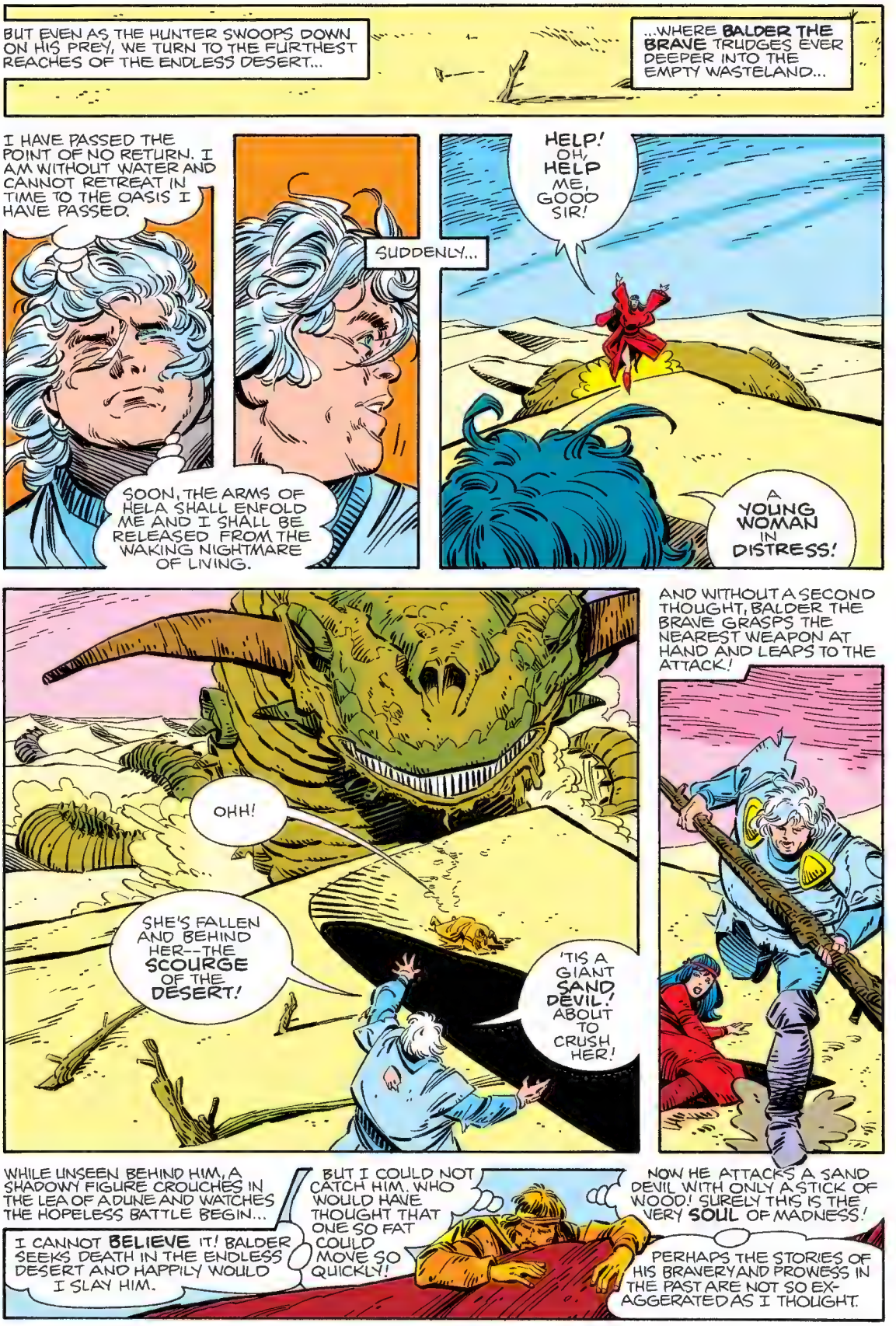

MEANWHILE, IN MANHATTAN, BENEATH AN ABANDONED SECTION OF THE WEST SIDE HIGHWAY...
ACCORDING TO THE DIRECTIONS, THERE OUGHT TO BE A SEALED PACKAGE JUST BENEATH THAT SUPPORT BEAM.
AND SO THERE IS. WRAPPED IN BLACK CANVAS AND HELD IN PLACE BY ELECTRICAL TAPE.
IN THE SHADOWS WHERE NOBODY WOULD EVER FIND IT.
LET ME SET IT ON THE GROUND HERE AND OPEN IT UP. WE'LL SEE IF THERE REALLY IS SOMETHING TO THIS LEGEND.
AND THEN, THE NIGHT AROUND ROGER BEGINS TO GLOW...
JACKPOT!
THE CASKET OF ANCIENT WINTERS!
I'VE FOUND IT!
HOW COOL IT IS TO THE TOUCH. I COULD ALMOST BELIEVE IT DOES CONTAIN THE ESSENCE OF WINTERS PAST.
MACY'S
BUT I'LL STOP TO ADMIRE IT LATER.
SOMEBODY MIGHT NOTICE A GUY CARRYING A MYSTERIOUS BLACK CANVAS PACKAGE, BUT WHO'LL LOOK TWICE AT SOMEONE LUGGING A MACY'S BAG AROUND NEW YORK CITY?


BUT NO SOONER HAS ROGER TURNED THE CORNER ON 24TH STREET, HEADING FOR THE SUBWAY WHEN...
AT LAST! THE CASKET IS NEARLY MINE AGAIN!
NOW SHALL ALL MANKIND RUE THE DAY WHEN IT WAS STOLEN FROM ME SO LONG AGO!
BUT WAIT! WHAT'S THIS UPON THE GROUND?
BLACK CANVAS! THE CASKET'S PROTECTIVE SHEATH!
SOMEONE HAS BEEN HERE BEFORE ME AND SNATCHED THE CASKET FROM MY GRASP ONCE AGAIN!
STILL, THE FAMILY OF ERIC LIVES ON TO PLAGUE ME.
BUT THE CANVAS IS COOL! THE CASKET WAS HERE ONLY MOMENTS AGO!
AND THIS TIME, IT SHALL NOT ELUDE ME! FOR THE SCENT ON THE CANVAS IS FRESH!
NOW SHALL THE HUNTING HORN BE SOUNDED!
TONIGHT, THE WILD HUNT WILL RIDE AND THE CASKET SHALL AT LAST BE MINE!
AND A SINGLE NOTE, UNHEARD BY HUMAN EARS, RINGS IN THE NIGHT AIR.
WHILE AT THAT SELFSAME MOMENT IN THE PRECINCT HOUSE...
I HAVE NOTIFIED THE PROPER AUTHORITIES CONCERNING THESE MORTALS WHO HAVE BEEN LOST TO THE DARK ELF.
...I SHALL LEARN THE SECRET OF THE FAERIE ENCHANTMENT AND FREE THESE POOR SOULS FROM BONDAGE...
...BUT NOTHING HERE INDICATES THE WHEREABOUTS OF ROGER WILLIS.
I SWEAR THAT WHEN THIS PRESENT BUSINESS IS CONCLUDED...
PERHAPS--!
HARK! WHAT IS THIS MY EARS DO HEAR? SOME TRICK OF THE WIND?
NAY! I KNOW THAT SOUND! 'TIS THE HUNTING HORN OF FAERIE!
SOMEONE HATH CALLED THE WILD HUNT! IT CAN ONLY BE MALEKITH!
THEN HIS PREY MUST SURELY BE WITHIN HIS GRASP!


WHILE IN A CAB IN MIDTOWN...
I'VE SWITCHED CABS A COUPLE OF TIMES, BUT I CAN'T SHAKE THE FEELING THAT SOME SORT OF PURSUIT IS CLOSE BEHIND.
I'LL FEEL SAFER WHEN I'M OUT OF MANHATTAN.
THERE'S AN EXTRA TWENTY BUCKS IN IT FOR YOU IF YOU CAN GET ME ACROSS THE 59TH STREET BRIDGE IN TEN MINUTES.
I'LL DO WHAT I CAN, MAC, BUT THEATER TRAFFIC FRIDAY NIGHTS IS FEEROCIOUS.
THAT'S WHAT I WAS AFRAID OF.
AT LEAST I'M ARMED WITH STEEL JACKETED BULLETS.
IF ERIC WAS CORRECT, IRON IN ANY FORM WILL BE DEATH TO WHATEVER PURSUES ME THAT CAN'T BE KILLED BY ORDINARY MEANS.
AT LAST, THE BRIDGE! BUT TRAFFIC'S SLOWED ALMOST TO A STANDSTILL.
FEELS LIKE A STORM BREWIN' TONIGHT, MAC.
HOLY COW! HERE IT COMES! A REAL CLOUDBURST, TOO!
NOW THE TRAFFIC'S COMPLETELY STUCK. %*'!*£#$!!
MIGHT AS WELL BE PARKED!
AND WHAT'S ALL THAT HOWLING? SOUNDS LIKE ALL HELL JUST BROKE LOOSE!


THE CABBIE IS NOT FAR FROM WRONG!
FOR TONIGHT, THE WILD HUNT IS UP AND THE QUARRY IS IN SIGHT!
THERE IN THE SKY! IT'S TRUE! IT WAS ALL TRUE!
THEY'VE FOUND ME! THE HOUNDS OF THE HUNTER!
WHILE I'M CAUGHT HERE LIKE A SITTING DUCK!
FAB-4
HEY, MAC! WHAT ABOUT MY FARE?
BUT AS THE CABBIE LOOKS OVER HIS SHOULDER...
HOLY HANNAH! WHO'S THEM?
LEMME OUTTA HERE!

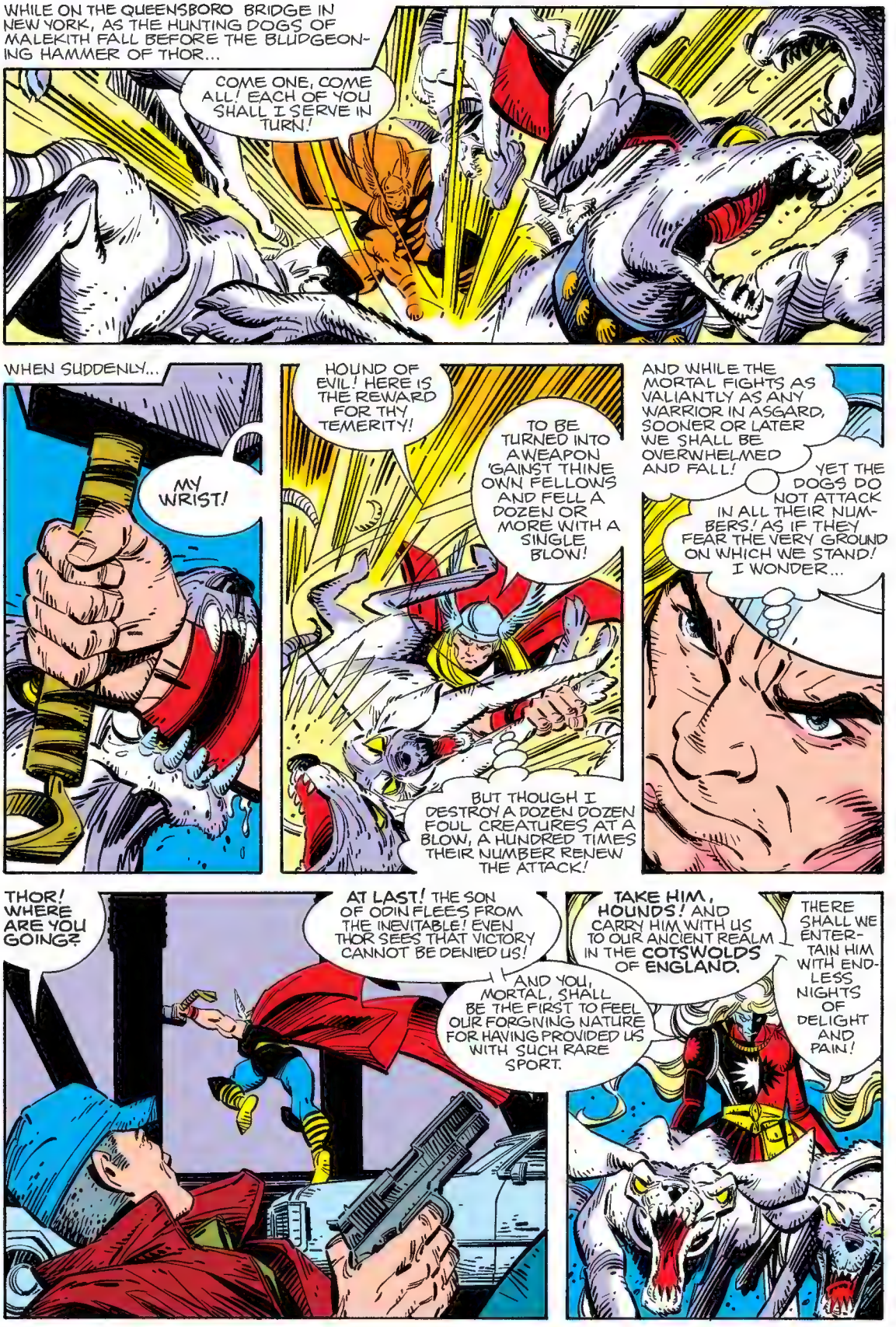
BUT WHILE THE CABBIE FLEES...
THE DOGS HAVE ALMOST CAUGHT UP WITH ME.
I GUESS IT'S TIME WE LEARNED WHETHER OR NOT IRON CAN REALLY KILL THESE THINGS.
LOOKS LIKE IT'S HAGARU-RI, KOREA, ALL OVER AGAIN!
ONLY THERE I HAD A PLATOON TO BACK ME UP AND HERE, THIS OLD .45 IS MY ONLY FRIEND!
KA-POW!
GOT HIM! BUT HERE COME THE REST OF THEM!
WELL, IF THEY WANT THE CASKET THAT BADLY, THEY'RE GOING TO HAVE TO GET IT THE OLD FASHIONED WAY!
THEY'LL HAVE TO EARN IT!
KA-POW! KA-POW! KA-POW!
THE DOGS ARE PULLING BACK! THIS IS IT! HERE COMES THE MASTER OF THE HOUNDS!
TREMBLE AND DESPAIR, MORTAL!
YOUR DOOM HAS COME AND THE CASKET IS MINE!

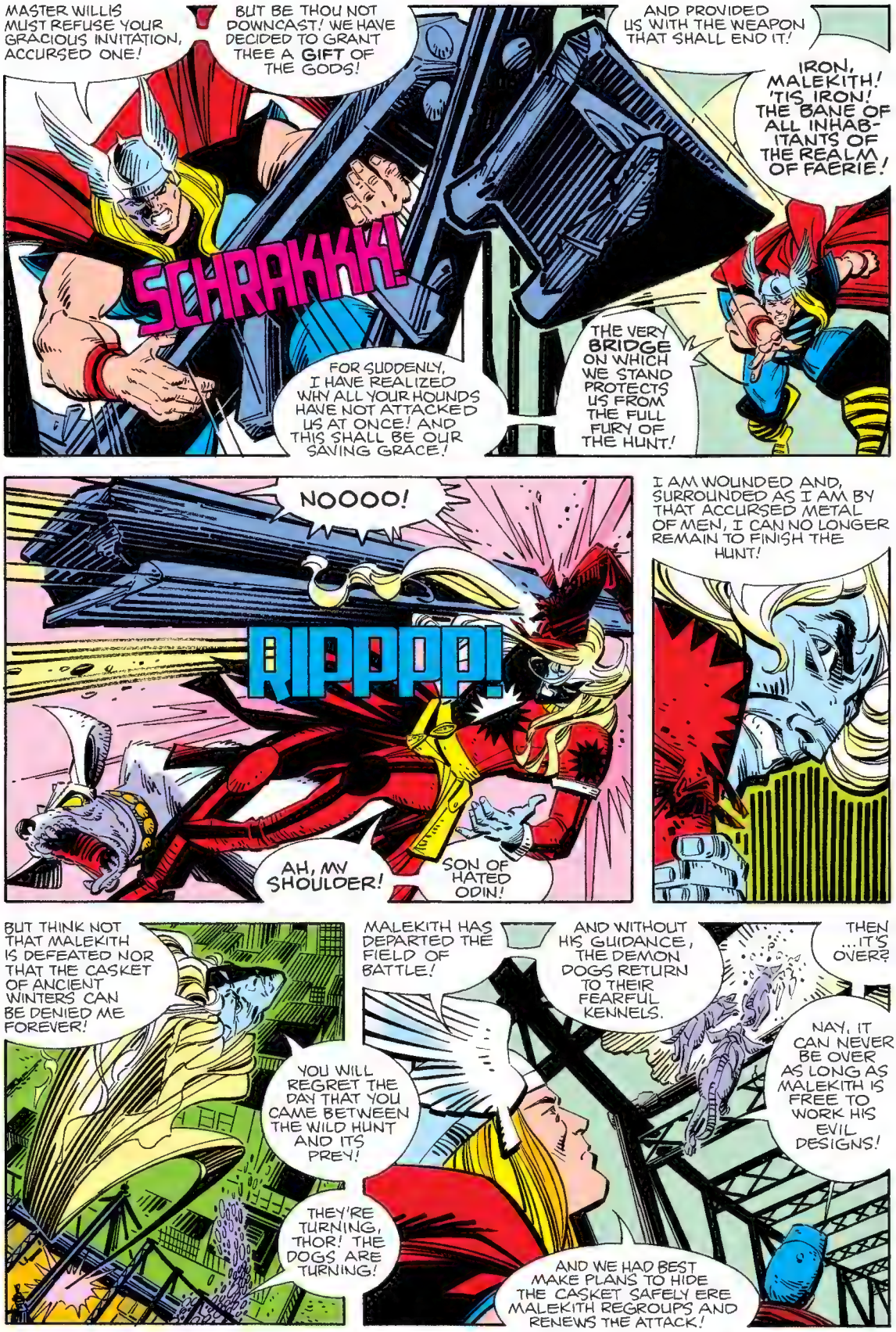

BUT EVEN AS THE HUNTER SWOOPS DOWN ON HIS PREY, WE TURN TO THE FURTHEST REACHES OF THE ENDLESS DESERT...
...WHERE BALDER THE BRAVE TRUDGES EVER DEEPER INTO THE EMPTY WASTELAND...
I HAVE PASSED THE POINT OF NO RETURN. I AM WITHOUT WATER AND CANNOT RETREAT IN TIME TO THE OASIS I HAVE PASSED.
SOON, THE ARMS OF HELA SHALL ENFOLD ME AND I SHALL BE RELEASED FROM THE WAKING NIGHTMARE OF LIVING.
SUDDENLY...
HELP! OH, HELP ME, GOOD SIR!
A YOUNG WOMAN IN DISTRESS!
AND WITHOUT A SECOND THOUGHT, BALDER THE BRAVE GRASPS THE NEAREST WEAPON AT HAND AND LEAPS TO THE ATTACK!
OHH!
SHE'S FALLEN AND BEHIND HER--THE SCOURGE OF THE DESERT!
'TIS A GIANT SAND DEVIL! ABOUT TO CRUSH HER!
WHILE UNSEEN BEHIND HIM, A SHADOWY FIGURE CROUCHES IN THE LEA OF A DUNE AND WATCHES THE HOPELESS BATTLE BEGIN...
I CANNOT BELIEVE IT! BALDER SEEKS DEATH IN THE ENDLESS DESERT AND HAPPILY WOULD I SLAY HIM.
BUT I COULD NOT CATCH HIM. WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT ONE SO FAT COULD MOVE SO QUICKLY!
NOW HE ATTACKS A SAND DEVIL WITH ONLY A STICK OF WOOD! SURELY THIS IS THE VERY SOUL OF MADNESS!
PERHAPS THE STORIES OF HIS BRAVERY AND PROWESS IN THE PAST ARE NOT SO EXAGGERATED AS I THOUGHT.

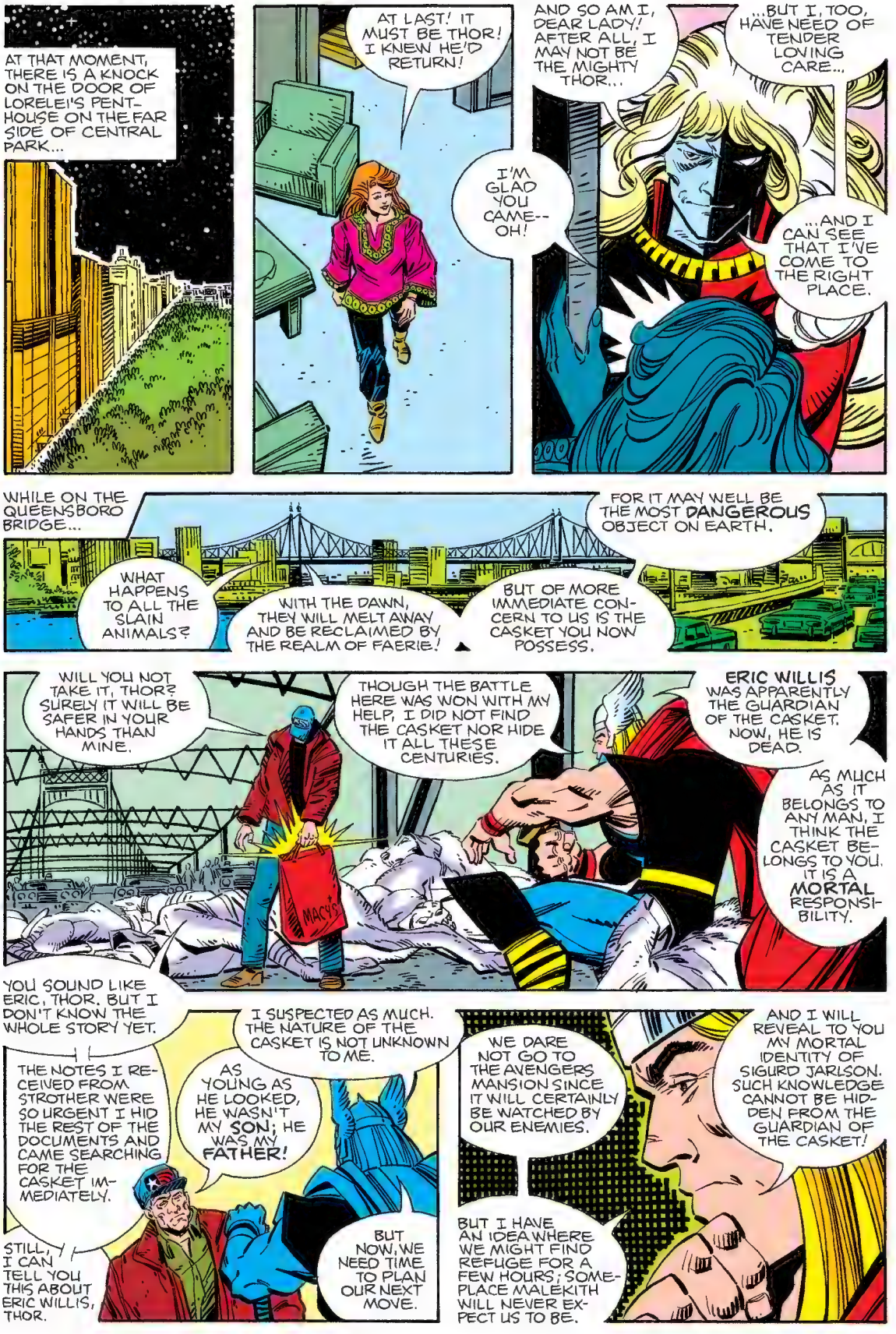
BUT AS BALDER BATTLES FOR THE LIFE OF THE GIRL, LET US RETURN TO EARTH WHERE...
KA-POW!
KA-POW!
THE STEED HAS FALLEN BUT THE RIDER IS UNHURT! AND MY CLIP IS EMPTY!
CURSE YOU, MORTAL! NEVER BEFORE HAS ANYONE SLAIN THE HUNTSMAN'S MOUNT!
FOR THIS AFFRONT I SHALL NOT DESTROY YOU!
INSTEAD, AT THE TOUCH OF MY SPEAR, YOU SHALL WRITHE IN A THOUSAND UNTOLD AGONIES AND LONG FOR DEATH...
...A MERCY I MAY NEVER GRANT YOU.
BARR-OOMM!
WHA--! LIGHTNING STRIKING ME DOWN!
MY FORM! I'M LOSING MY HUNTSMAN GARB!
SO! 'TIS TRUE! MALEKITH THE ACCURSED IS INDEED FREE IN THE WORLD!
THOR!

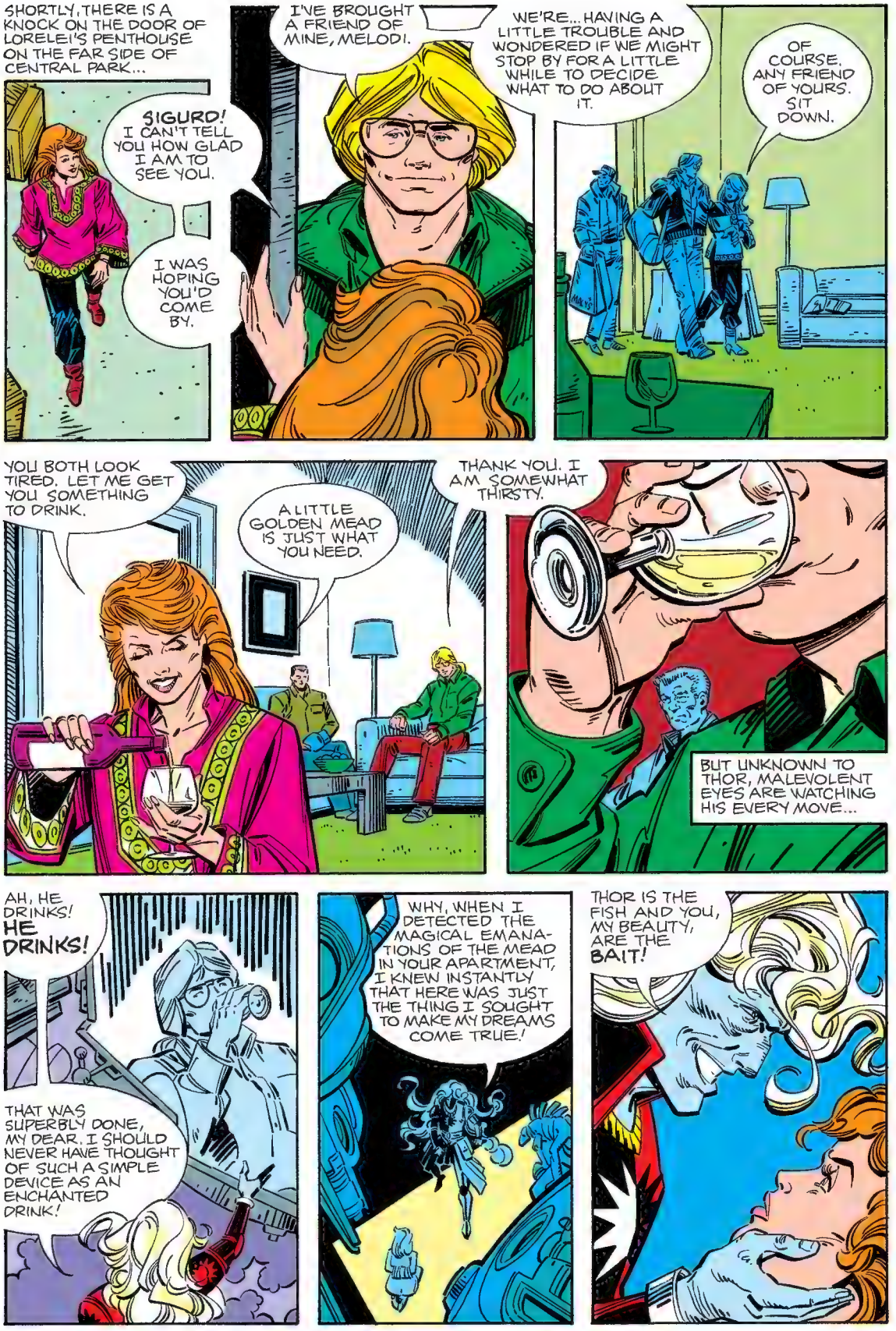
HOW WONDERFUL!
SEIZE HIM, MY HOUNDS, AND TEAR HIM LIMB FROM LIMB!
THUS DO WE SERVE THE SONS OF ASGARD!
LET THOR'S END BE THE HARBINGER OF THE DOOM TO COME!
BUT THE BEASTS OF MALEKITH FIND THAT ODIN'S SON IS NO SIMPLE PREY AS HE MEETS THEIR ATTACK WITH A FEROCITY THAT MORE THAN EQUALS THEIR OWN.
BACK! BACK, YOU SCURRILOUS DOGS OF DEATH!
YOUR SLAVERING ANGER IS AS NOTHING COMPARED TO THE WRATH OF THE GOD OF THUNDER!
MORTAL, HOW FARE YOU?
DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME! I'VE HAD A CHANCE TO RELOAD!
BUT WATCH YOUR BACK, THOR!
KA-POW!
KA-POW!
THEN COMMEND YOUR SPIRIT TO ODIN AND WE SHALL SHOW THESE BEASTS THE VERY HEART OF THE STORM UNLEASHED!
THE CREATURES ATTACK FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE BRIDGE!
THROD
BOOMM!

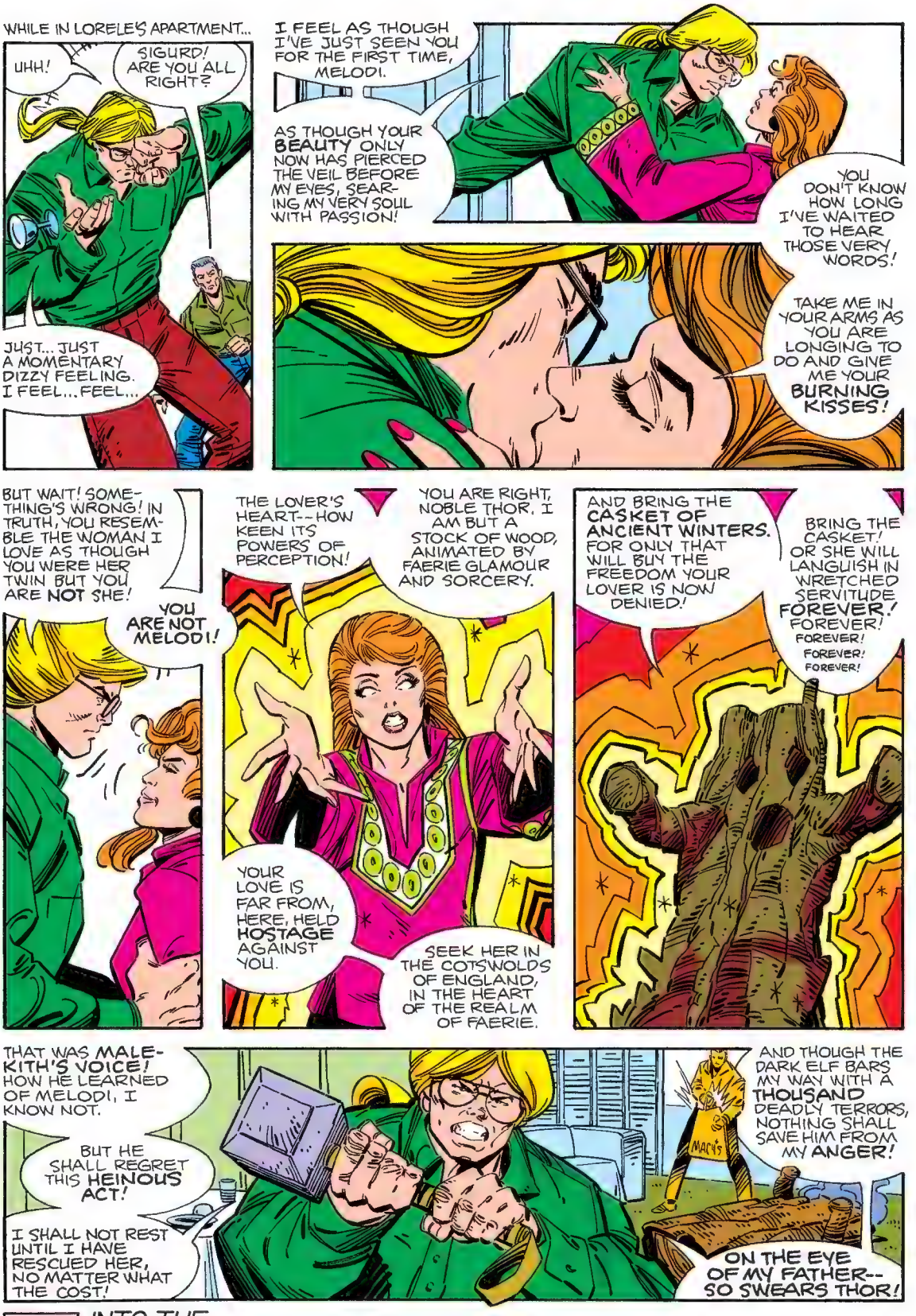
ELSEWHERE, BEYOND THE FIELDS WE KNOW, A MIGHTY HOST STANDS TO ARMS.
AND A VOICE AS OLD AS TIME CRIES OUT...
SONS OF MUSPELL! DAUGHTERS OF FURY! DEMONS OF THE FLAME!
OUR TIME HAS COME!
SOUND THE BATTLECRY THAT ALL WHO LIVE MAY HEAR IT AND DESPAIR!
AND THE LAND OF FIRE EXPLODES WITH...
D.O.O.M.!


WHILE ON THE QUEENSBORO BRIDGE IN NEW YORK, AS THE HUNTING DOGS OF MALEKITH FALL BEFORE THE BLUDGEONING HAMMER OF THOR...
COME ONE, COME ALL! EACH OF YOU SHALL I SERVE IN TURN!
WHEN SUDDENLY...
MY WRIST!
HOUND OF EVIL! HERE IS THE REWARD FOR THY TEMERITY!
TO BE TURNED INTO A WEAPON 'GAINST THINE OWN FELLOWS AND FELL A DOZEN OR MORE WITH A SINGLE BLOW!
BUT THOUGH I DESTROY A DOZEN DOZEN FOUL CREATURES AT A BLOW, A HUNDRED TIMES THEIR NUMBER RENEW THE ATTACK!
AND WHILE THE MORTAL FIGHTS AS VALIANTLY AS ANY WARRIOR IN ASGARD, SOONER OR LATER WE SHALL BE OVERWHELMED AND FALL!
YET THE DOGS DO NOT ATTACK IN ALL THEIR NUMBERS! AS IF THEY FEAR THE VERY GROUND ON WHICH WE STAND! I WONDER...
THOR! WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
AT LAST! THE SON OF ODIN FLEES FROM THE INEVITABLE! EVEN THOR SEES THAT VICTORY CANNOT BE DENIED US!
AND YOU, MORTAL, SHALL BE THE FIRST TO FEEL OUR FORGIVING NATURE FOR HAVING PROVIDED US WITH SUCH RARE SPORT.
TAKE HIM, HOUNDS! AND CARRY HIM WITH US TO OUR ANCIENT REALM IN THE COTSWOLDS OF ENGLAND.
THERE SHALL WE ENTERTAIN HIM WITH ENDLESS NIGHTS OF DELIGHT AND PAIN!


MASTER WILLIS MUST REFUSE YOUR GRACIOUS INVITATION, ACCURSED ONE!
BUT BE THOU NOT DOWNCAST! WE HAVE DECIDED TO GRANT THEE A GIFT OF THE GODS!
AND PROVIDED US WITH THE WEAPON THAT SHALL END IT!
IRON, MALEKITH! 'TIS IRON! THE BANE OF ALL INHABITANTS OF THE REALM OF FAERIE!
SCHRAKKK!
FOR SUDDENLY, I HAVE REALIZED WHY ALL YOUR HOUNDS HAVE NOT ATTACKED US AT ONCE! AND THIS SHALL BE OUR SAVING GRACE!
THE VERY BRIDGE ON WHICH WE STAND PROTECTS US FROM THE FULL FURY OF THE HUNT!
NOOOO!
RIPPPP!
AH, MY SHOULDER!
SON OF HATED ODIN!
I AM WOUNDED AND, SURROUNDED AS I AM BY THAT ACCURSED METAL OF MEN, I CAN NO LONGER REMAIN TO FINISH THE HUNT!
BUT THINK NOT THAT MALEKITH IS DEFEATED NOR THAT THE CASKET OF ANCIENT WINTERS CAN BE DENIED ME FOREVER!
YOU WILL REGRET THE DAY THAT YOU CAME BETWEEN THE WILD HUNT AND ITS PREY!
THEY'RE TURNING, THOR! THE DOGS ARE TURNING!
MALEKITH HAS DEPARTED THE FIELD OF BATTLE!
AND WITHOUT HIS GUIDANCE, THE DEMON DOGS RETURN TO THEIR FEARFUL KENNELS.
THEN ...IT'S OVER?
NAY, IT CAN NEVER BE OVER AS LONG AS MALEKITH IS FREE TO WORK HIS EVIL DESIGNS!
AND WE HAD BEST MAKE PLANS TO HIDE THE CASKET SAFELY ERE MALEKITH REGROUPS AND RENEWS THE ATTACK!


AT THAT MOMENT, THERE IS A KNOCK ON THE DOOR OF LORELEI'S PENTHOUSE ON THE FAR SIDE OF CENTRAL PARK...
AT LAST! IT MUST BE THOR! I KNEW HE'D RETURN!
I'M GLAD YOU CAME-- OH!
AND SO AM I, DEAR LADY! AFTER ALL, I MAY NOT BE THE MIGHTY THOR...
...BUT I, TOO, HAVE NEED OF TENDER LOVING CARE...
...AND I CAN SEE THAT I'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE.
WHILE ON THE QUEENSBORO BRIDGE...
WHAT HAPPENS TO ALL THE SLAIN ANIMALS?
WITH THE DAWN, THEY WILL MELT AWAY AND BE RECLAIMED BY THE REALM OF FAERIE!
BUT OF MORE IMMEDIATE CONCERN TO US IS THE CASKET YOU NOW POSSESS.
FOR IT MAY WELL BE THE MOST DANGEROUS OBJECT ON EARTH.
WILL YOU NOT TAKE IT, THOR? SURELY IT WILL BE SAFER IN YOUR HANDS THAN MINE.
THOUGH THE BATTLE HERE WAS WON WITH MY HELP, I DID NOT FIND THE CASKET NOR HIDE IT ALL THESE CENTURIES.
ERIC WILLIS WAS APPARENTLY THE GUARDIAN OF THE CASKET. NOW, HE IS DEAD.
AS MUCH AS IT BELONGS TO ANY MAN, I THINK THE CASKET BELONGS TO YOU. IT IS A MORTAL RESPONSIBILITY.
YOU SOUND LIKE ERIC, THOR. BUT I DON'T KNOW THE WHOLE STORY YET.
THE NOTES I RECEIVED FROM STROTHER WERE SO URGENT I HID THE REST OF THE DOCUMENTS AND CAME SEARCHING FOR THE CASKET IMMEDIATELY.
STILL, I CAN TELL YOU THIS ABOUT ERIC WILLIS, THOR.
I SUSPECTED AS MUCH. THE NATURE OF THE CASKET IS NOT UNKNOWN TO ME.
AS YOUNG AS HE LOOKED, HE WASN'T MY SON; HE WAS MY FATHER!
BUT NOW, WE NEED TIME TO PLAN OUR NEXT MOVE.
WE DARE NOT GO TO THE AVENGERS MANSION SINCE IT WILL CERTAINLY BE WATCHED BY OUR ENEMIES.
BUT I HAVE AN IDEA WHERE WE MIGHT FIND REFUGE FOR A FEW HOURS; SOMEPLACE MALEKITH WILL NEVER EXPECT US TO BE.
AND I WILL REVEAL TO YOU MY MORTAL IDENTITY OF SIGURD JARLSON. SUCH KNOWLEDGE CANNOT BE HIDDEN FROM THE GUARDIAN OF THE CASKET!


SHORTLY, THERE IS A KNOCK ON THE DOOR OF LORELEI'S PENTHOUSE ON THE FAR SIDE OF CENTRAL PARK...
SIGURD! I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW GLAD I AM TO SEE YOU.
I WAS HOPING YOU'D COME BY.
I'VE BROUGHT A FRIEND OF MINE, MELODI.
WE'RE... HAVING A LITTLE TROUBLE AND WONDERED IF WE MIGHT STOP BY FOR A LITTLE WHILE TO DECIDE WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT.
OF COURSE, ANY FRIEND OF YOURS. SIT DOWN.
YOU BOTH LOOK TIRED. LET ME GET YOU SOMETHING TO DRINK.
A LITTLE GOLDEN MEAD IS JUST WHAT YOU NEED.
THANK YOU. I AM SOMEWHAT THIRSTY.
BUT UNKNOWN TO THOR, MALEVOLENT EYES ARE WATCHING HIS EVERY MOVE...
AH, HE DRINKS! HE DRINKS!
THAT WAS SUPERBLY DONE, MY DEAR. I SHOULD NEVER HAVE THOUGHT OF SUCH A SIMPLE DEVICE AS AN ENCHANTED DRINK!
WHY, WHEN I DETECTED THE MAGICAL EMANATIONS OF THE MEAD IN YOUR APARTMENT, I KNEW INSTANTLY THAT HERE WAS JUST THE THING I SOUGHT TO MAKE MY DREAMS COME TRUE!
THOR IS THE FISH AND YOU, MY BEAUTY, ARE THE BAIT!


WHILE IN LORELEI'S APARTMENT...
UHH!
SIGURD! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
JUST... JUST A MOMENTARY DIZZY FEELING. I FEEL... FEEL...
I FEEL AS THOUGH I'VE JUST SEEN YOU FOR THE FIRST TIME, MELODI.
AS THOUGH YOUR BEAUTY ONLY NOW HAS PIERCED THE VEIL BEFORE MY EYES, SEARING MY VERY SOUL WITH PASSION!
YOU DON'T KNOW HOW LONG I'VE WAITED TO HEAR THOSE VERY WORDS!
TAKE ME IN YOUR ARMS AS YOU ARE LONGING TO DO AND GIVE ME YOUR BURNING KISSES!
BUT WAIT! SOMETHING'S WRONG! IN TRUTH, YOU RESEMBLE THE WOMAN I LOVE AS THOUGH YOU WERE HER TWIN BUT YOU ARE NOT SHE!
YOU ARE NOT MELODI!
THE LOVER'S HEART--HOW KEEN ITS POWERS OF PERCEPTION!
YOU ARE RIGHT, NOBLE THOR. I AM BUT A STOCK OF WOOD, ANIMATED BY FAERIE GLAMOUR AND SORCERY.
YOUR LOVE IS FAR FROM, HERE, HELD HOSTAGE AGAINST YOU.
SEEK HER IN THE COTSWOLDS OF ENGLAND, IN THE HEART OF THE REALM OF FAERIE.
AND BRING THE CASKET OF ANCIENT WINTERS. FOR ONLY THAT WILL BUY THE FREEDOM OF YOUR LOVER IS NOW DENIED!
BRING THE CASKET! OR SHE WILL LANGUISH IN WRETCHED SERVITUDE FOREVER! FOREVER! FOREVER! FOREVER!
THAT WAS MALEKITH'S VOICE! HOW HE LEARNED OF MELODI, I KNOW NOT.
BUT HE SHALL REGRET THIS HEINOUS ACT!
I SHALL NOT REST UNTIL I HAVE RESCUED HER, NO MATTER WHAT THE COST!
MACY'S
AND THOUGH THE DARK ELF BARS MY WAY WITH A THOUSAND DEADLY TERRORS, NOTHING SHALL SAVE HIM FROM MY ANGER!
ON THE EYE OF MY FATHER--SO SWEARS THOR!

NEXT: *INTO THE REALM OF FAERIE!* (THERE TO FIND LOVE'S FIRST SWEET KISS--AND A GOOD DEAL OF TROUBLE BESIDES!)

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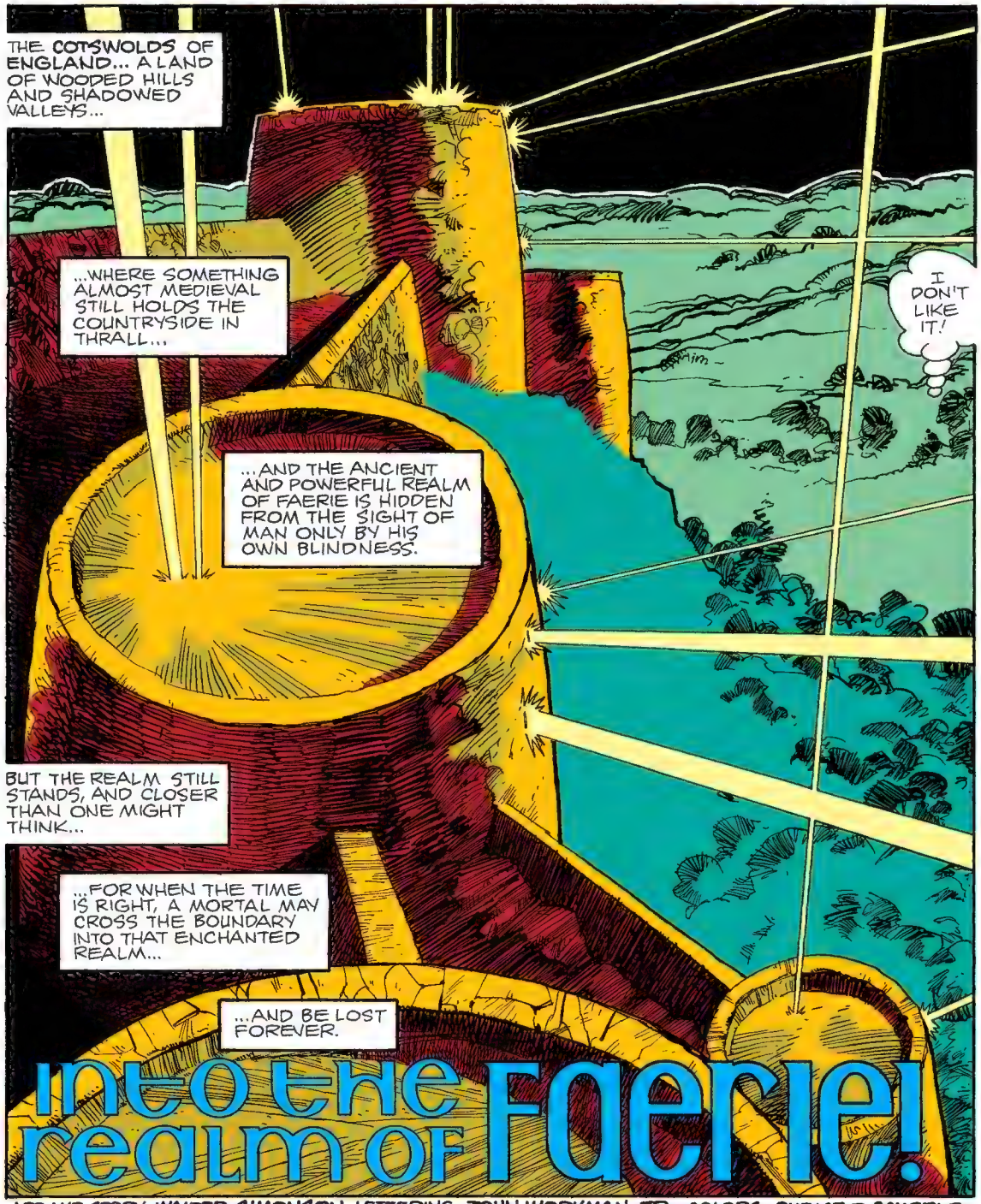
STAN LEE PRESENTS: the MIGHTY THOR®


THE COTSWOLDS OF ENGLAND... A LAND OF WOODED HILLS AND SHADOWED VALLEYS...
...WHERE SOMETHING ALMOST MEDIEVAL STILL HOLDS THE COUNTRYSIDE IN THRALL...
...AND THE ANCIENT AND POWERFUL REALM OF FAERIE IS HIDDEN FROM THE SIGHT OF MAN ONLY BY HIS OWN BLINDNESS.
I DON'T LIKE IT!
BUT THE REALM STILL STANDS, AND CLOSER THAN ONE MIGHT THINK...
...FOR WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT, A MORTAL MAY CROSS THE BOUNDARY INTO THAT ENCHANTED REALM...
...AND BE LOST FOREVER.
into the realm of Faerie!

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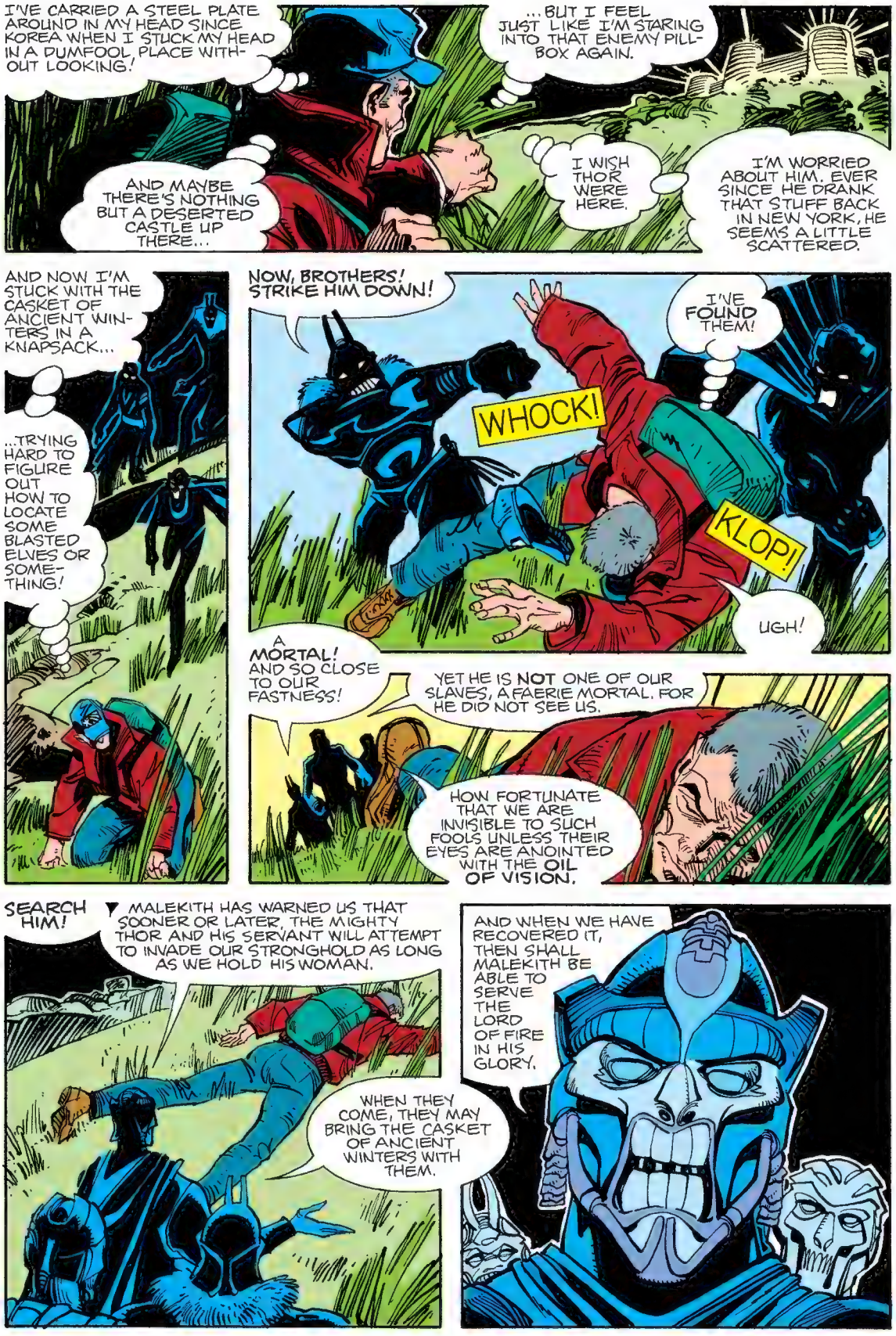
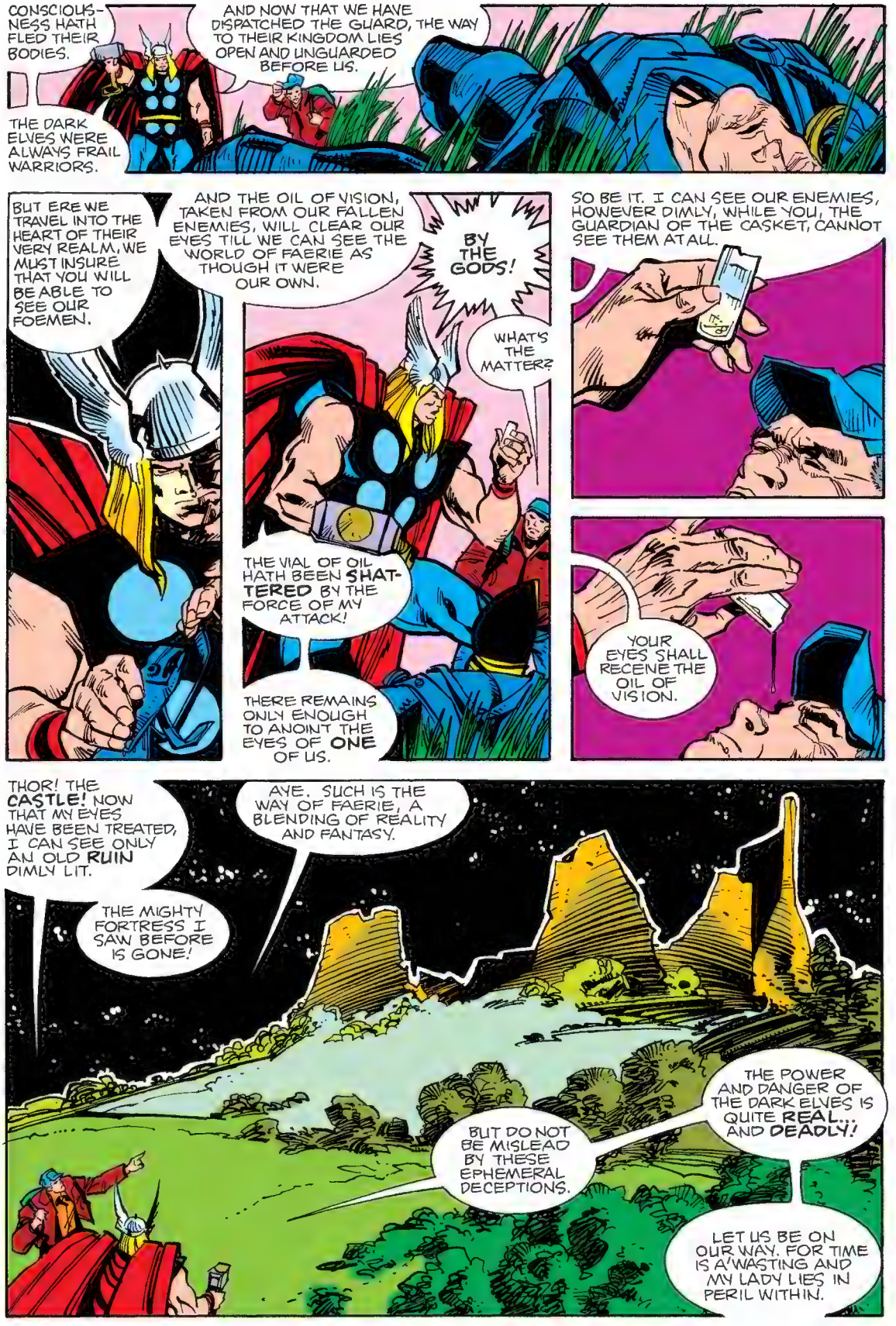
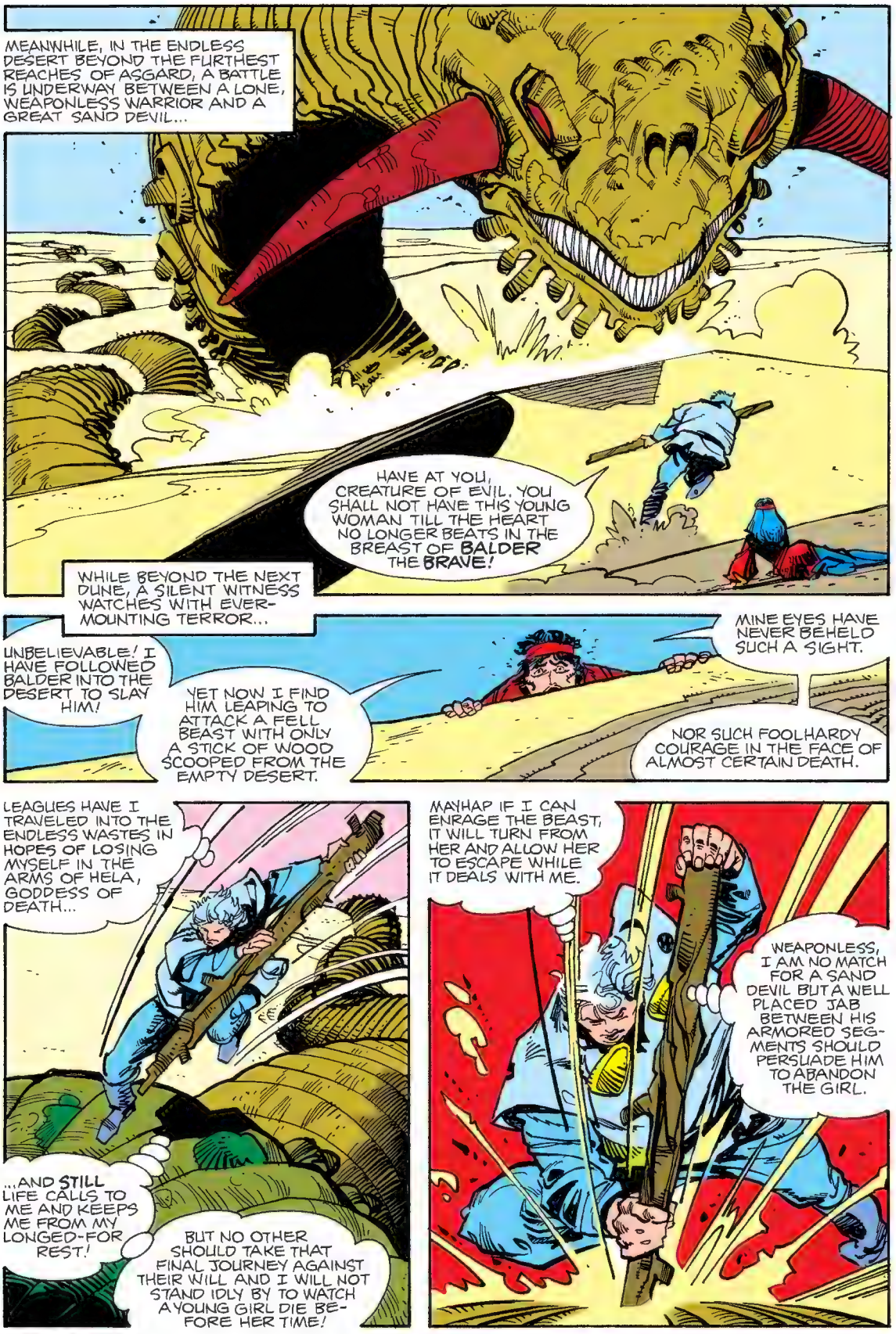
EDITING: MARK GRUENWALD · EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: JIM SHOOTER

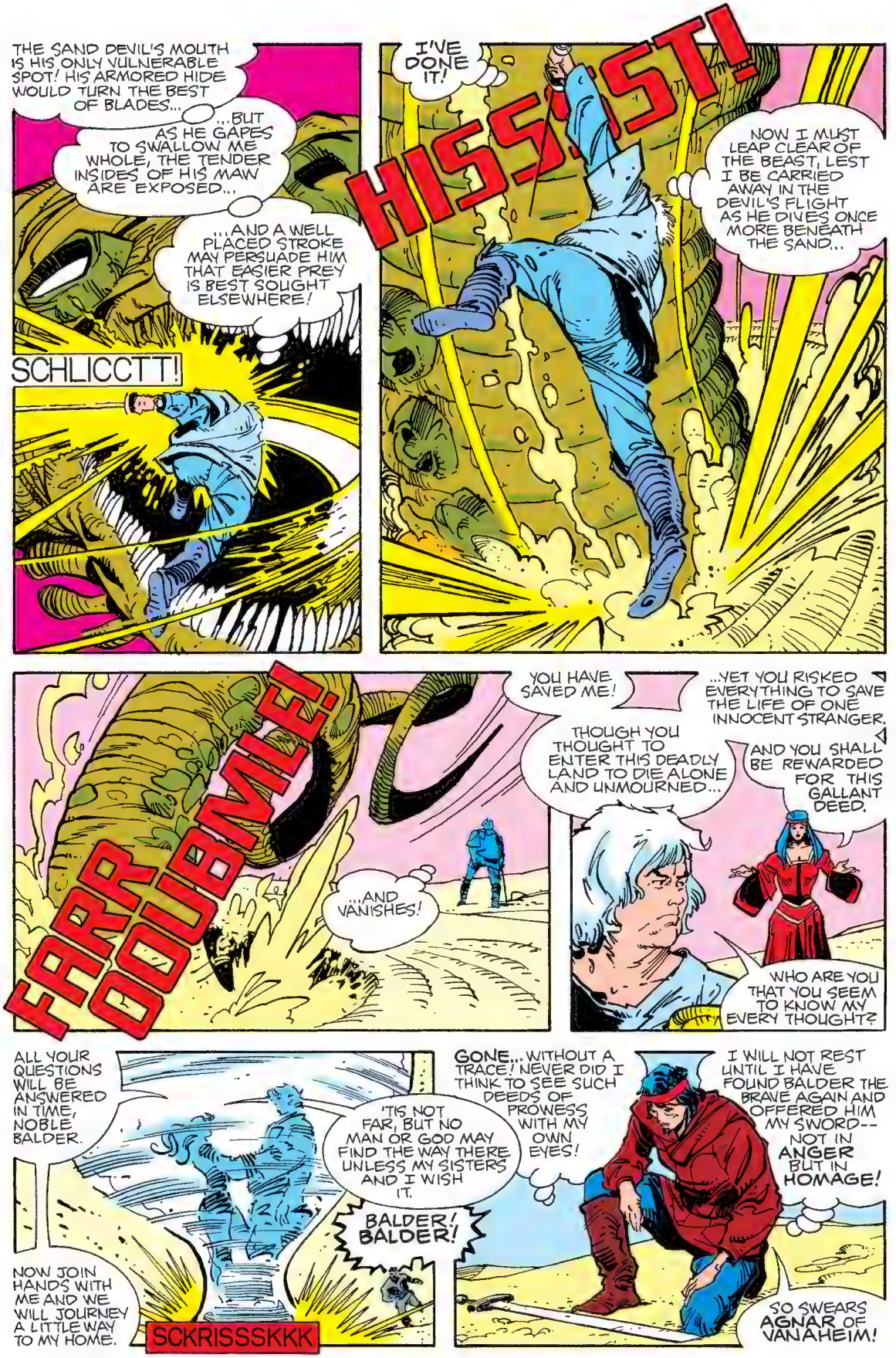

I'VE CARRIED A STEEL PLATE AROUND IN MY HEAD SINCE KOREA WHEN I STUCK MY HEAD IN A DUMFOOL PLACE WITHOUT LOOKING!
AND MAYBE THERE'S NOTHING BUT A DESERTED CASTLE UP THERE...
...BUT I FEEL JUST LIKE I'M STARING INTO THAT ENEMY PILLBOX AGAIN.
I WISH THOR WERE HERE.
I'M WORRIED ABOUT HIM. EVER SINCE HE DRANK THAT STUFF BACK IN NEW YORK, HE SEEMS A LITTLE SCATTERED.
AND NOW I'M STUCK WITH THE CASKET OF ANCIENT WINTERS IN A KNAPSACK...
...TRYING HARD TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO LOCATE SOME BLASTED ELVES OR SOMETHING!
NOW, BROTHERS! STRIKE HIM DOWN!
I'VE FOUND THEM!
WHOCK!
KLOP!
UGH!
A MORTAL! AND SO CLOSE TO OUR FASTNESS!
YET HE IS NOT ONE OF OUR SLAVES, A FAERIE MORTAL. FOR HE DID NOT SEE US.
HOW FORTUNATE THAT WE ARE INVISIBLE TO SUCH FOOLS UNLESS THEIR EYES ARE ANOINTED WITH THE OIL OF VISION.
SEARCH HIM!
MALEKITH HAS WARNED US THAT SOONER OR LATER, THE MIGHTY THOR AND HIS SERVANT WILL ATTEMPT TO INVADE OUR STRONGHOLD AS LONG AS WE HOLD HIS WOMAN.
WHEN THEY COME, THEY MAY BRING THE CASKET OF ANCIENT WINTERS WITH THEM.
AND WHEN WE HAVE RECOVERED IT, THEN SHALL MALEKITH BE ABLE TO SERVE THE LORD OF FIRE IN HIS GLORY.

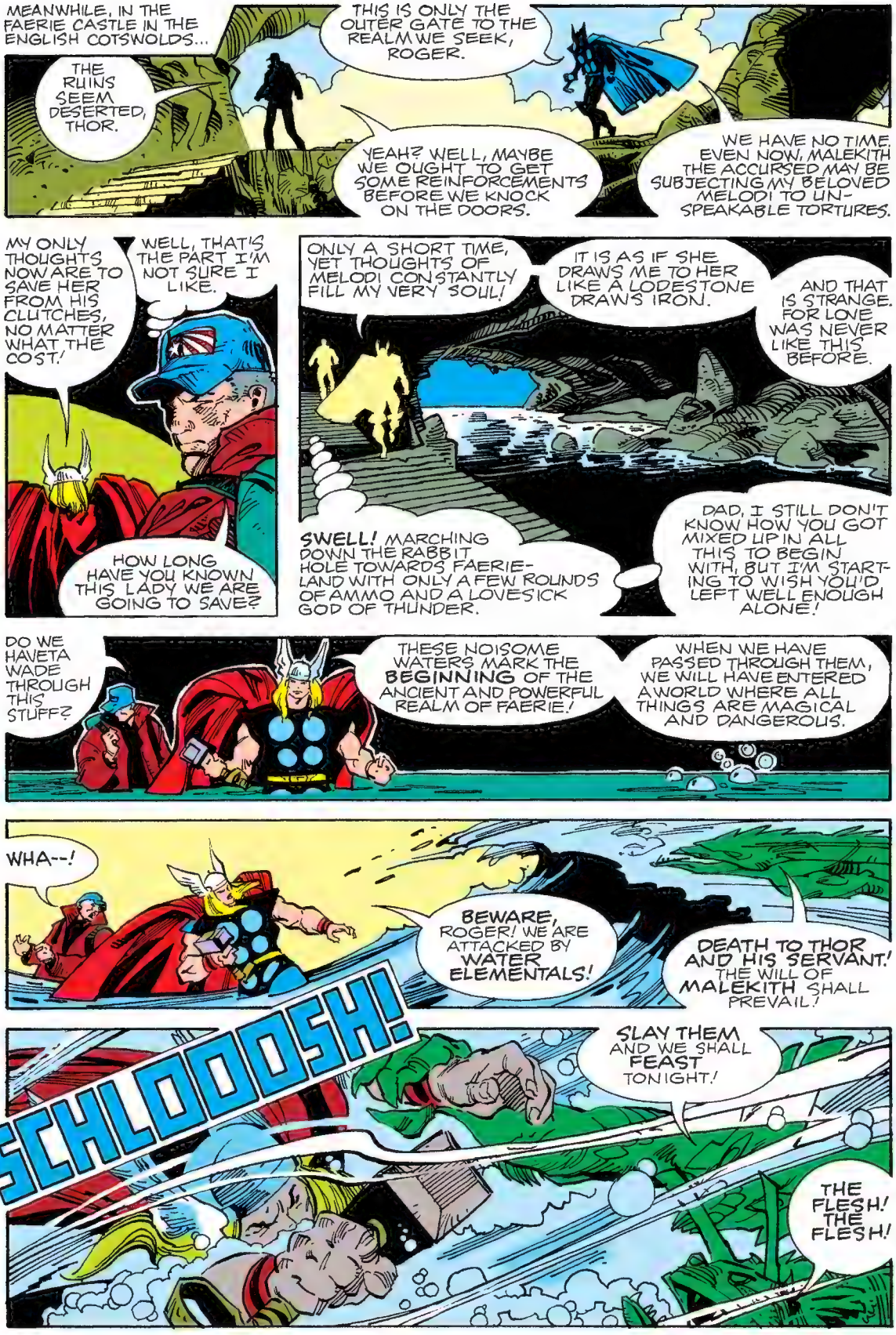
BROTHERS! BEHOLD! WE HAVE FOUND IT! THE CASKET OF ANCIENT WINTERS IS OURS!
IN A PIG'S EYE!
I MAY NOT BE ABLE TO SEE YOU, BUT I'VE FOUGHT IN DARKER PLACES THAN THIS!
KAUGH!
THE MORTAL WAS SHAMMING! SEIZE HIM!
WHO--? THOR!
THAT WAS WELL DONE, ROGER.
HAD THE ELVES KEPT UP THEIR GUARD, THEY WOULD LIKELY HAVE DETECTED MY APPROACH DESPITE MY STEALTH.
YES, THOR, MISCREANTS!
...BUT THEY CAN SEE ENOUGH!
HERE, NEAR THE VERY CENTER OF YOUR POWER, EVEN MY EYES CANNOT SEE YOU CLEARLY...
KA-THWASSH!

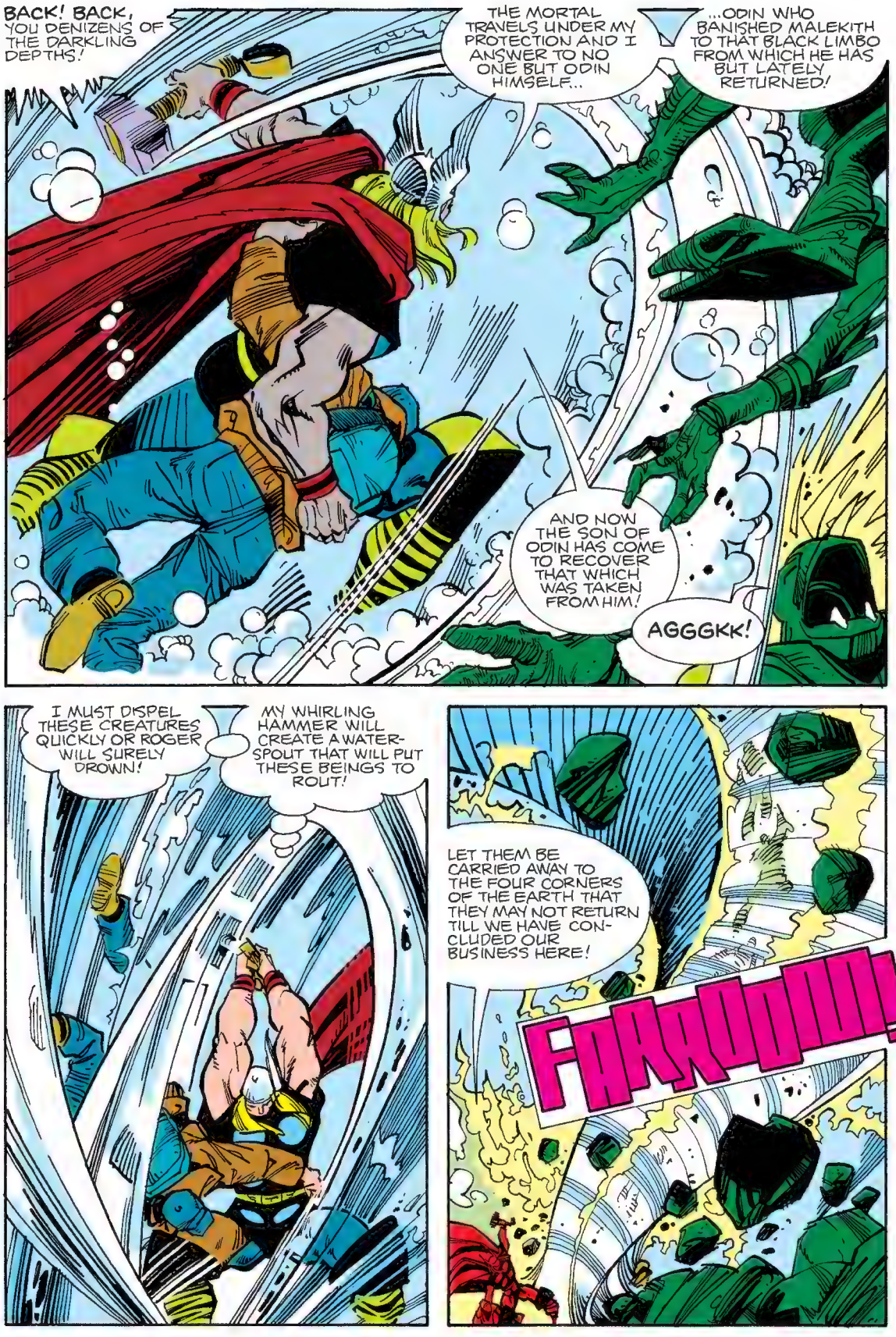

CONSCIOUSNESS HATH FLED THEIR BODIES.
AND NOW THAT WE HAVE DISPATCHED THE GUARD, THE WAY TO THEIR KINGDOM LIES OPEN AND UNGUARDED BEFORE US.
THE DARK ELVES WERE ALWAYS FRAIL WARRIORS.
BUT ERE WE TRAVEL INTO THE HEART OF THEIR VERY REALM, WE MUST INSURE THAT YOU WILL BE ABLE TO SEE OUR FOEMEN.
AND THE OIL OF VISION, TAKEN FROM OUR FALLEN ENEMIES, WILL CLEAR OUR EYES TILL WE CAN SEE THE WORLD OF FAERIE AS THOUGH IT WERE OUR OWN.
BY THE GODS!
WHAT'S THE MATTER?
THE VIAL OF OIL HATH BEEN SHATTERED BY THE FORCE OF MY ATTACK!
THERE REMAINS ONLY ENOUGH TO ANOINT THE EYES OF ONE OF US.
SO BE IT. I CAN SEE OUR ENEMIES, HOWEVER DIMLY, WHILE YOU, THE GUARDIAN OF THE CASKET, CANNOT SEE THEM AT ALL.
YOUR EYES SHALL RECEIVE THE OIL OF VISION.
THOR! THE CASTLE! NOW THAT MY EYES HAVE BEEN TREATED, I CAN SEE ONLY AN OLD RUIN DIMLY LIT.
AYE. SUCH IS THE WAY OF FAERIE, A BLENDING OF REALITY AND FANTASY.
THE MIGHTY FORTRESS I SAW BEFORE IS GONE!
THE POWER AND DANGER OF THE DARK ELVES IS QUITE REAL... AND DEADLY!
BUT DO NOT BE MISLEAD BY THESE EPHEMERAL DECEPTIONS.
LET US BE ON OUR WAY. FOR TIME IS A'WASTING AND MY LADY LIES IN PERIL WITHIN.


MEANWHILE, IN THE ENDLESS DESERT BEYOND THE FURTHEST REACHES OF ASGARD, A BATTLE IS UNDERWAY BETWEEN A LONE, WEAPONLESS WARRIOR AND A GREAT SAND DEVIL...
HAVE AT YOU, CREATURE OF EVIL. YOU SHALL NOT HAVE THIS YOUNG WOMAN TILL THE HEART NO LONGER BEATS IN THE BREAST OF BALDER THE BRAVE!
WHILE BEYOND THE NEXT DUNE, A SILENT WITNESS WATCHES WITH EVER-MOUNTING TERROR...
UNBELIEVABLE! I HAVE FOLLOWED BALDER INTO THE DESERT TO SLAY HIM!
YET NOW I FIND HIM LEAPING TO ATTACK A FELL BEAST WITH ONLY A STICK OF WOOD SCOOPED FROM THE EMPTY DESERT.
MINE EYES HAVE NEVER BEHELD SUCH A SIGHT.
NOR SUCH FOOLHARDY COURAGE IN THE FACE OF ALMOST CERTAIN DEATH.
LEAGUES HAVE I TRAVELED INTO THE ENDLESS WASTES IN HOPES OF LOSING MYSELF IN THE ARMS OF HELA, GODDESS OF DEATH...
...AND STILL LIFE CALLS TO ME AND KEEPS ME FROM MY LONGED-FOR REST!
BUT NO OTHER SHOULD TAKE THAT FINAL JOURNEY AGAINST THEIR WILL AND I WILL NOT STAND IDLY BY TO WATCH A YOUNG GIRL DIE BE-FORE HER TIME!
MAYHAP IF I CAN ENRAGE THE BEAST, IT WILL TURN FROM HER AND ALLOW HER TO ESCAPE WHILE IT DEALS WITH ME.
WEAPONLESS, I AM NO MATCH FOR A SAND DEVIL BUT A WELL PLACED JAB BETWEEN HIS ARMORED SEG-MENTS SHOULD PERSUADE HIM TO ABANDON THE GIRL.

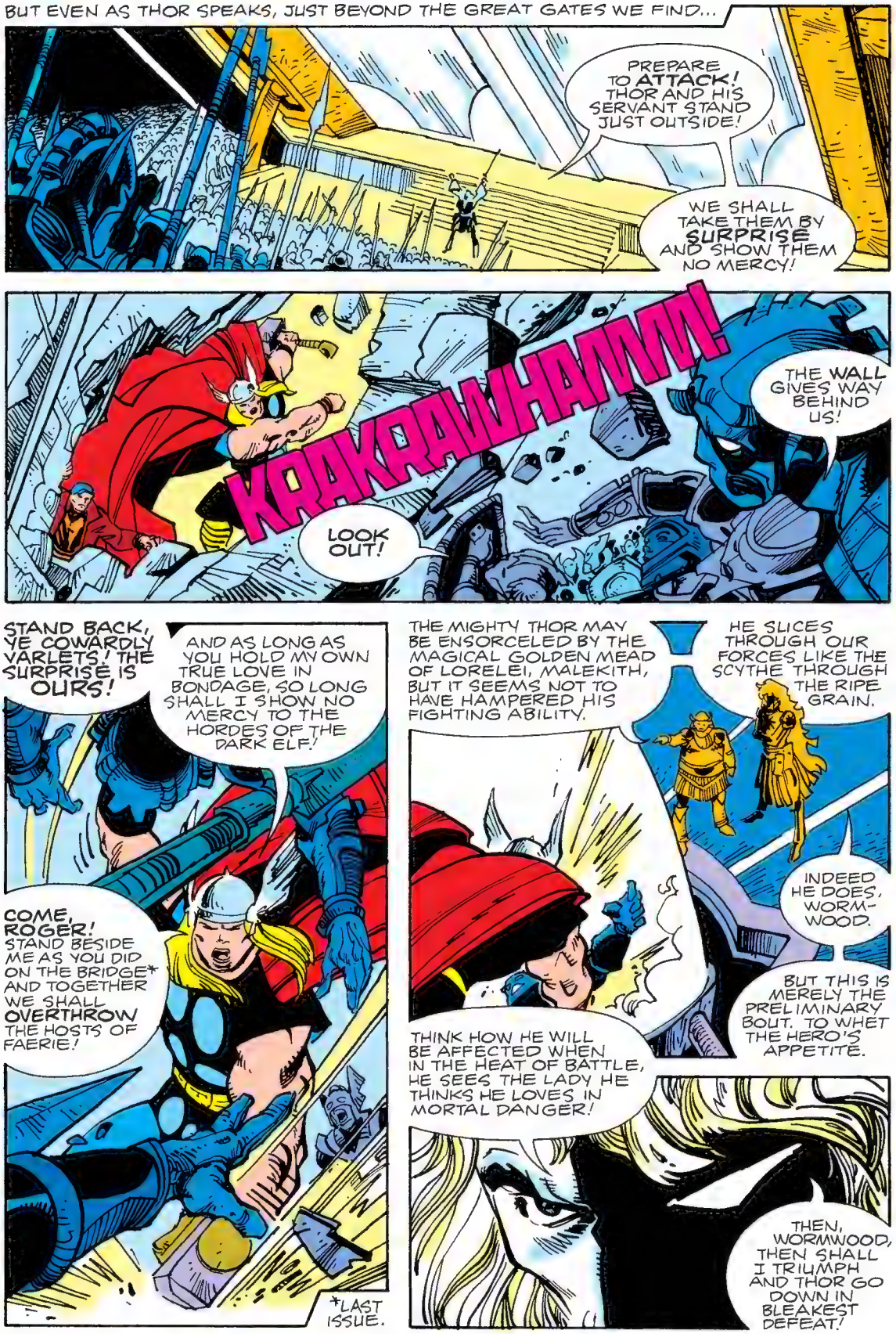
SUCCESS! HIS MIGHTY HEAD SWINGS THIS WAY. IF THE FATES ARE WITH ME, I MAY YET--
UGGH!
HE'S HURT THE BEAST! IT HAS FORGOTTEN THE GIRL AND TURNS TO ATTACK BALDER!
AND THE BRAVE ONE LIES STUNNED BY HIS FALL!
I... I SHOULD HELP BUT IT WOULD BE SUICIDE. I HAVE NOT THE BRAVERY NOR THE SKILL TO DEAL WITH A SAND DEVIL.
BUT THOUGH I THOUGHT TO SLAY BALDER MYSELF TO PROVE MY GLORY, I CANNOT SIT IDLY BY AND WATCH HIM BE SLAIN BY SUCH A CREATURE!
IF WEAPONLESS HE HAS DRAWN THE DEVIL AWAY FROM ITS PREY, WHAT MIGHT HE NOT DO IF ARMED WITH A GOOD SWORD!
MAY ODIN GIVE YOU STRENGTH, BRAVE ONE!
'TWOULD SEEM MY DEATH IS FINALLY AT HAND! AND THOUGH I HAVE SOUGHT IT FOR AN ETERNITY, I DO REGRET... BUT WAIT!
WHAT'S THIS BEFORE ME?
A RIGHT STRONG BLADE!
TRULY, THE FATES HAVE SMILED UPON ME THIS DAY!
THE LADY AND I MAY YET HAVE A CHANCE TO ESCAPE OUR DOOM!
FOR ASGARD AND ODIN!


THE SAND DEVIL'S MOUTH IS HIS ONLY VULNERABLE SPOT! HIS ARMORED HIDE WOULD TURN THE BEST OF BLADES...
...BUT AS HE GAPES TO SWALLOW ME WHOLE, THE TENDER INSIDES OF HIS MAW ARE EXPOSED...
...AND A WELL PLACED STROKE MAY PERSUADE HIM THAT EASIER PREY IS BEST SOUGHT ELSEWHERE!
SCHLICCTT!
I'VE DONE IT!
HISSSST!
NOW I MUST LEAP CLEAR OF THE BEAST, LEST I BE CARRIED AWAY IN THE DEVIL'S FLIGHT AS HE DIVES ONCE MORE BENEATH THE SAND...
FARR OOUBMLE!
...AND VANISHES!
YOU HAVE SAVED ME!
...YET YOU RISKED EVERYTHING TO SAVE THE LIFE OF ONE INNOCENT STRANGER.
THOUGH YOU THOUGHT TO ENTER THIS DEADLY LAND TO DIE ALONE AND UNMOURNED...
AND YOU SHALL BE REWARDED FOR THIS GALLANT DEED.
WHO ARE YOU THAT YOU SEEM TO KNOW MY EVERY THOUGHT?
ALL YOUR QUESTIONS WILL BE ANSWERED IN TIME, NOBLE BALDER.
'TIS NOT FAR, BUT NO MAN OR GOD MAY FIND THE WAY THERE UNLESS MY SISTERS AND I WISH IT.
BALDER! BALDER!
NOW JOIN HANDS WITH ME AND WE WILL JOURNEY A LITTLE WAY TO MY HOME.
SCKRISSSKKK
GONE... WITHOUT A TRACE! NEVER DID I THINK TO SEE SUCH DEEDS OF PROWESS WITH MY OWN EYES!
I WILL NOT REST UNTIL I HAVE FOUND BALDER THE BRAVE AGAIN AND OFFERED HIM MY SWORD-- NOT IN ANGER BUT IN HOMAGE!
SO SWEARS AGNAR OF VANAHEIM!

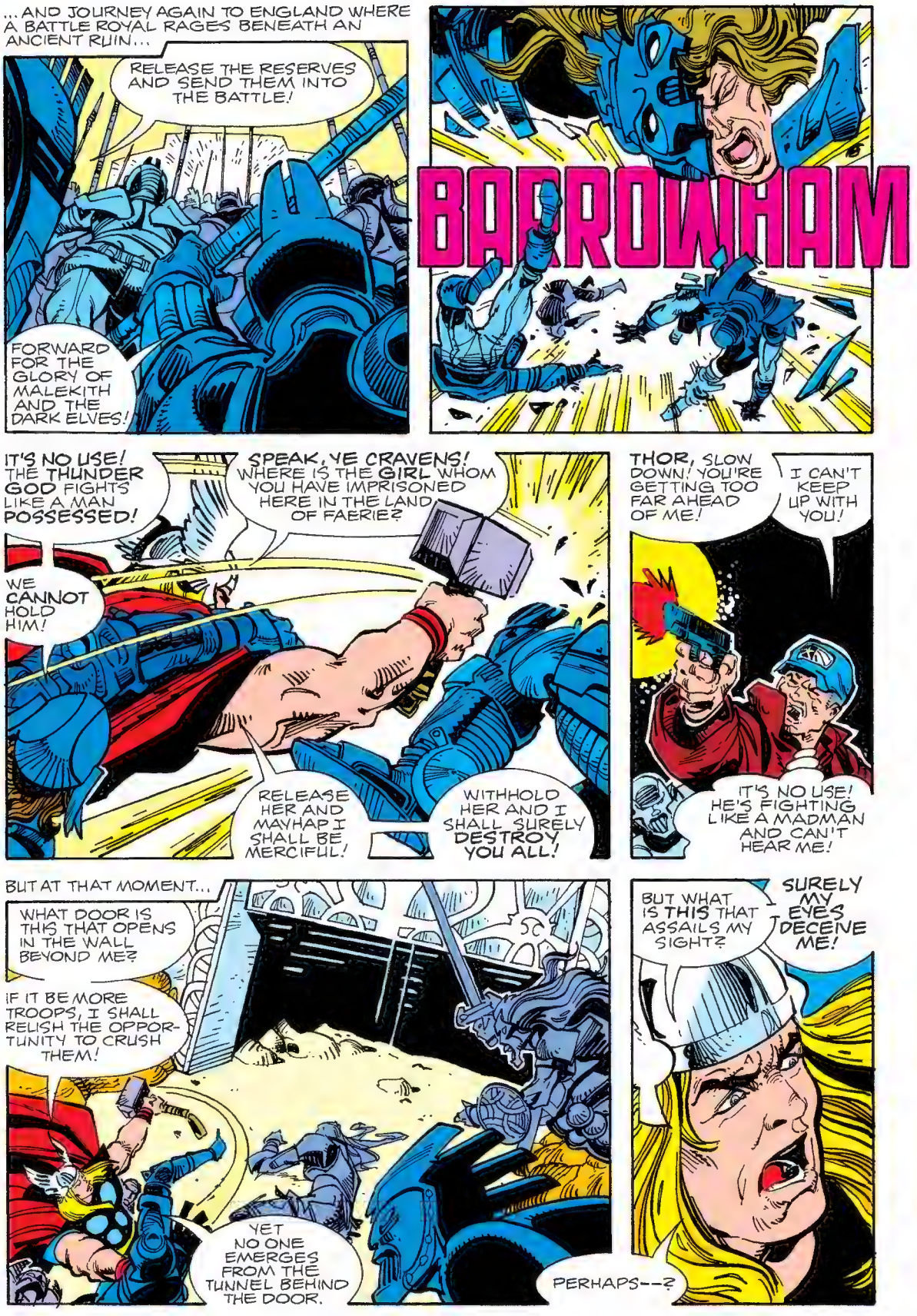

MEANWHILE, IN THE FAERIE CASTLE IN THE ENGLISH COTSWOLDS...
THE RUINS SEEM DESERTED, THOR.
THIS IS ONLY THE OUTER GATE TO THE REALM WE SEEK, ROGER.
YEAH? WELL, MAYBE WE OUGHT TO GET SOME REINFORCEMENTS BEFORE WE KNOCK ON THE DOORS.
WE HAVE NO TIME. EVEN NOW, MALEKITH THE ACCURSED MAY BE SUBJECTING MY BELOVED MELODI TO UNSPEAKABLE TORTURES.
MY ONLY THOUGHTS NOW ARE TO SAVE HER FROM HIS CLUTCHES, NO MATTER WHAT THE COST!
WELL, THAT'S THE PART I'M NOT SURE I LIKE.
HOW LONG HAVE YOU KNOWN THIS LADY WE ARE GOING TO SAVE?
ONLY A SHORT TIME, YET THOUGHTS OF MELODI CONSTANTLY FILL MY VERY SOUL!
IT IS AS IF SHE DRAWS ME TO HER LIKE A LODESTONE DRAWS IRON.
AND THAT IS STRANGE. FOR LOVE WAS NEVER LIKE THIS BEFORE.
SWELL! MARCHING DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE TOWARDS FAERIELAND WITH ONLY A FEW ROUNDS OF AMMO AND A LOVESICK GOD OF THUNDER.
DAD, I STILL DON'T KNOW HOW YOU GOT MIXED UP IN ALL THIS TO BEGIN WITH, BUT I'M STARTING TO WISH YOU'D LEFT WELL ENOUGH ALONE!
DO WE HAVETA WADE THROUGH THIS STUFF?
THESE NOISOME WATERS MARK THE BEGINNING OF THE ANCIENT AND POWERFUL REALM OF FAERIE!
WHEN WE HAVE PASSED THROUGH THEM, WE WILL HAVE ENTERED A WORLD WHERE ALL THINGS ARE MAGICAL AND DANGEROUS.
WHA--!
BEWARE, ROGER! WE ARE ATTACKED BY WATER ELEMENTALS!
DEATH TO THOR AND HIS SERVANT! THE WILL OF MALEKITH SHALL PREVAIL!
SCHLOOOSH!
SLAY THEM AND WE SHALL FEAST TONIGHT!
THE FLESH! THE FLESH!


BACK! BACK, YOU DENIZENS OF THE DARKLING DEPTHS!
THE MORTAL TRAVELS UNDER MY PROTECTION AND I ANSWER TO NO ONE BUT ODIN HIMSELF...
...ODIN WHO BANISHED MALEKITH TO THAT BLACK LIMBO FROM WHICH HE HAS BUT LATELY RETURNED!
AND NOW THE SON OF ODIN HAS COME TO RECOVER THAT WHICH WAS TAKEN FROM HIM!
AGGGKK!
I MUST DISPEL THESE CREATURES QUICKLY OR ROGER WILL SURELY DROWN!
MY WHIRLING HAMMER WILL CREATE A WATER-SPOUT THAT WILL PUT THESE BEINGS TO ROUT!
LET THEM BE CARRIED AWAY TO THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE EARTH THAT THEY MAY NOT RETURN TILL WE HAVE CONCLUDED OUR BUSINESS HERE!
FAROOOM!

AND AS THE DEPARTING WATERS EMPTY THE VAST RIVER BED, THERE BENEATH THEIR ICY DEPTHS IS REVEALED...
THE GREAT GATES OF FAERIE! THE VERY ENTRANCE TO THAT REALM PRIMEVAL!
WOW, LOOK AT THE SIZE OF THOSE THINGS!
LISTEN, THOR, I REALLY THINK WE OUGHT TO GET SOME RE-INFORCEMENTS BEFORE WE GO CALLING.
YOUR WORDS ARE WISE, MORTAL, BUT MY LOVE FOR THE WOMAN WHO LIES IN DANGER WITHIN DRIVES ME ON!
AND NEITHER FAERIE DOORS NOR FAERIE WARRIORS WILL PREVENT ME FROM ENTERING HERE AND SEEKING HER OUT!


BUT EVEN AS THOR SPEAKS, JUST BEYOND THE GREAT GATES WE FIND...
PREPARE TO ATTACK! THOR AND HIS SERVANT STAND JUST OUTSIDE!
WE SHALL TAKE THEM BY SURPRISE AND SHOW THEM NO MERCY!
KRAKRAWHAAAM!
THE WALL GIVES WAY BEHIND US!
LOOK OUT!
STAND BACK, YE COWARDLY VARLETS! THE SURPRISE IS OURS!
AND AS LONG AS YOU HOLD MY OWN TRUE LOVE IN BONDAGE, SO LONG SHALL I SHOW NO MERCY TO THE HORDES OF THE DARK ELF!
COME, ROGER! STAND BESIDE ME AS YOU DID ON THE BRIDGE* AND TOGETHER WE SHALL OVERTHROW THE HOSTS OF FAERIE!
*LAST ISSUE.
THE MIGHTY THOR MAY BE ENSORCELED BY THE MAGICAL GOLDEN MEAD OF LORELEI, MALEKITH, BUT IT SEEMS NOT TO HAVE HAMPERED HIS FIGHTING ABILITY.
HE SLICES THROUGH OUR FORCES LIKE THE SCYTHE THROUGH THE RIPE GRAIN.
INDEED HE DOES, WORMWOOD.
BUT THIS IS MERELY THE PRELIMINARY BOUT. TO WHET THE HERO'S APPETITE.
THINK HOW HE WILL BE AFFECTED WHEN IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE, HE SEES THE LADY HE THINKS HE LOVES IN MORTAL DANGER!
THEN, WORMWOOD, THEN SHALL I TRIUMPH AND THOR GO DOWN IN BLEAKEST DEFEAT!

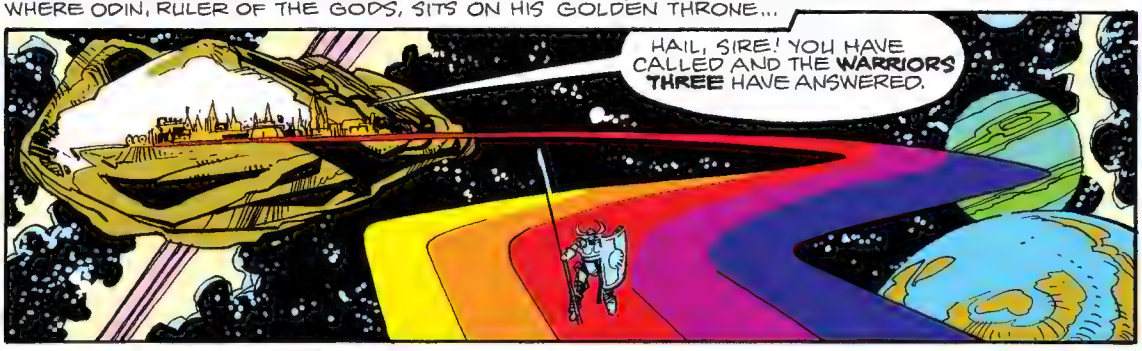
MEANWHILE, AS THE WHIRLWIND ABATES, BALDER FINDS HIMSELF AT THE ENTRANCE TO A GREAT CAVERN BEYOND THE ENDLESS DESERT...
COME, BRAVE BALDER. YOUR JOURNEY'S END IS ONLY A FEW STEPS AWAY THROUGH THIS ANCIENT VAULT.
WHO ARE YOU? YOU ARE NO ORDINARY BEING, NOR EVEN A GOD AS I HAVE KNOWN THEM.
YOU ARE YOUNG AND FAIR TO LOOK UPON BUT THERE IS AN AURA OF GREAT AGE UPON YOU, AS THOUGH YOU HAD LIVED BEYOND THE COUNT OF YEARS.
YOUR EYES AND SENSES DO NOT BETRAY YOU, YOUNG GOD. FOR, OLD AS YOU ARE, I AM OLDER STILL. AS ARE MY SISTERS.
I AM CALLED WYRD AND I WELCOME YOU TO OUR HOME.
YOUR VOICE! YOUR VERY FORM SHIFTS BEFORE MINE EYES!
SURELY YOU CAN BE NONE OTHER THAN ONE OF THE NORNS THEM-SELVES...
...THE KEEPERS OF FATE THAT RULE EVEN THE GODS!
YES, MY BRAVE. I AM ONE OF THE NORNS, THE THREE SISTERS OF FATE.
HERE BEFORE YOU LIES OUR GREEN VALLEY FILLED WITH THE MIGHTY ROOT OF THE WORLD ASH, YGGSDRASIL ITSELF.
BELOW US IS THE WELL OF WYRD, FILLED WITH THE WATER OF LIFE...
...AND YONDER ARE MY SISTERS.
FOR WE HAVE BEEN WAITING SINCE THE DAWN OF TIME TO SPEAK WITH BALDER THE BRAVE AT THIS TIME AND PLACE.
BUT WE SHALL HAVE TO WAIT A LITTLE LONGER TO LEARN THE PURPOSE OF THE MYSTERIOUS NORNS, FOR NOW WE MUST LEAVE BALDER AND HIS COMPANION...

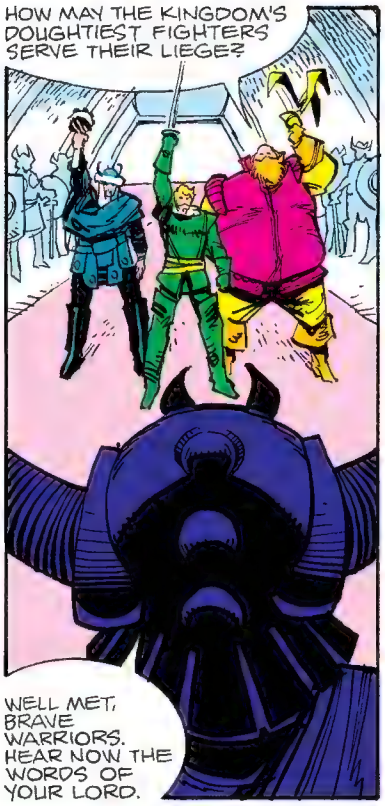

...AND JOURNEY AGAIN TO ENGLAND WHERE A BATTLE ROYAL RAGES BENEATH AN ANCIENT RUIN...
RELEASE THE RESERVES AND SEND THEM INTO THE BATTLE!
FORWARD FOR THE GLORY OF MALEKITH AND THE DARK ELVES!
BARROWHAM
IT'S NO USE! THE THUNDER GOD FIGHTS LIKE A MAN POSSESSED!
SPEAK, YE CRAVENS! WHERE IS THE GIRL WHOM YOU HAVE IMPRISONED HERE IN THE LAND OF FAERIE?
WE CANNOT HOLD HIM!
RELEASE HER AND MAYHAP I SHALL BE MERCIFUL!
WITHHOLD HER AND I SHALL SURELY DESTROY YOU ALL!
THOR, SLOW DOWN! YOU'RE GETTING TOO FAR AHEAD OF ME!
I CAN'T KEEP UP WITH YOU!
IT'S NO USE! HE'S FIGHTING LIKE A MADMAN AND CAN'T HEAR ME!
BUT AT THAT MOMENT...
WHAT DOOR IS THIS THAT OPENS IN THE WALL BEYOND ME?
IF IT BE MORE TROOPS, I SHALL RELISH THE OPPORTUNITY TO CRUSH THEM!
YET NO ONE EMERGES FROM THE TUNNEL BEHIND THE DOOR.
BUT WHAT IS THIS THAT ASSAILS MY SIGHT?
SURELY MY EYES DECEIVE ME!
PERHAPS--?

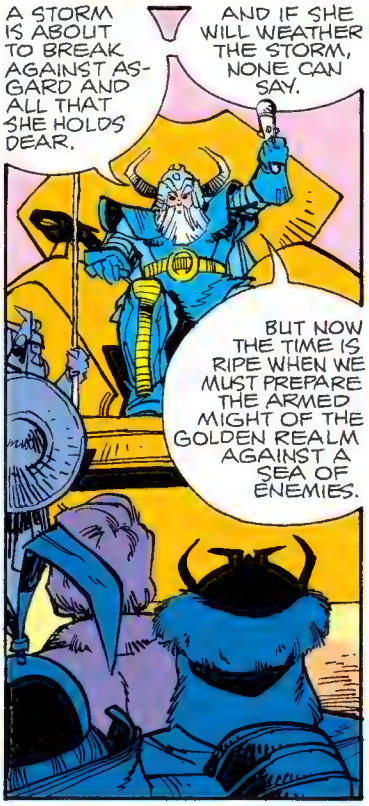
AND WELL MIGHT THOR STAND AGHAST FOR THROUGH THE DARKENED TUNNEL EMERGE NOT WARRIORS BUT A SIGHT TO CHILL THE BLOOD OF ANY MAN, GOD OR MORTAL...
COME, MY PETS. THOUGH YOU FAILED TO WIN YOUR EVE-NING MEAL TONIGHT...
...I SHALL TREAT YOU TO A DAINTY MORSEL...
...ESPECIALLY A MAN IN LOVE!
THE FLESH!
THE FLESH!
NOOOOO!
MELODI!
THOR! WAIT! LOOK AGAIN! DON'T YOU REMEMBER?
THOR!
YOU BLEW THOSE WATER DEMONS AWAY! IT'S AN ILLUSION!
AND NOW, BEFORE THE EYES OF THE SON OF ODIN HIM-SELF...
...LET THE FEAST BEGIN!
THOR! HELP MEEEE!
MELODI!!!
AND ALL OTHER THOUGHTS ARE DRIVEN FROM THOR'S MIND, SAVE THAT THE WOMAN HE LOVES IS IN MORTAL DANGER!

THOR! COME BACK! I CAN'T HOLD THEM OFF WITHOUT YOU!
DON'T FORGET THE CAS--
BUT ROGER'S CRY GOES UNHEEDED AS THOR RACES INTO THE TUNNEL...
MALEKITH WAS RIGHT! THE THUNDERER IS OBLIVIOUS TO EVERY-THING BUT THE WOMAN!
HE FAILED TO SEE ME IN THE SHADOWS IN MY EBONY ARMOR...
...BUT I CAN SEE HIM!
THARK!T!
UHHH!
A SINGLE BLOW HAS RENDERED HIM HELPLESS.
NOW I SHALL ADMINISTER THE COUP DE GRACE...
...AND FOREVER WILL THE LEGENDS SING OF THE GLORY OF ALGRIM THE STRONG, WHO SLEW THE MIGHTY THOR!

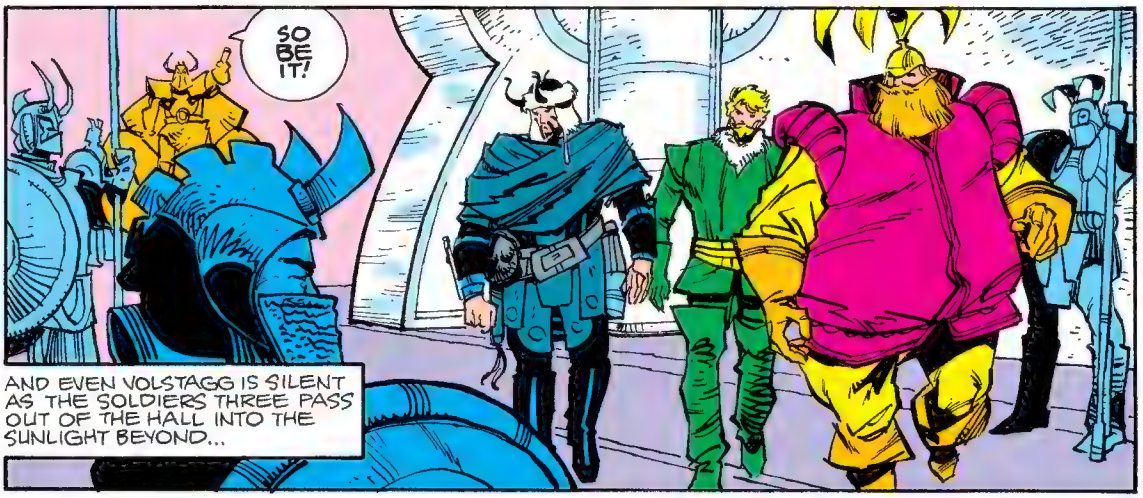
BUT AS ALGRIM PREPARES TO DELIVER THAT BLOW, LET US LOOK FOR A MOMENT AT FABLED ASGARD WHERE ODIN, RULER OF THE GODS, SITS ON HIS GOLDEN THRONE...






A STORM IS ABOUT TO BREAK AGAINST ASGARD AND ALL THAT SHE HOLDS DEAR.
AND IF SHE WILL WEATHER THE STORM, NONE CAN SAY.
BUT NOW THE TIME IS RIPE WHEN WE MUST PREPARE THE ARMED MIGHT OF THE GOLDEN REALM AGAINST A SEA OF ENEMIES.

THEREFORE I CHARGE THE WARRIORS THREE WITH THE TASK OF GATHERING AND ORDERING THE FIGHTING MEN OF ASGARD AND HER ALLIES.
TO EVERY CORNER OF THE KINGDOM LET THE WORD GO FORTH. **THE HOSTING OF ASGARD SHALL BEGIN!**



AT THAT SELFSAME MOMENT ON EARTH...
HOW THE DARK ELVES SHALL SING OF THIS MOMENT IN AGES HENCE! MY NAME SHALL STRIKE FEAR INTO THE HEARTS OF ASGARDIANS EVERYWHERE!
BRAGGART! ONLY THY TREACHEROUS BLOW FROM BEHIND ENABLED THEE TO FELL THE SON OF ODIN!
THY STRENGTH IS NOTHING COMPARED TO THAT OF ULIK THE TROLL!
AND IT IS LESS THAN NOTHING TO ME!
KRAK!
ARRGH!
EXCELLENT! OUR ILLUSION HAS SERVED ITS PURPOSE!
GUARDSMAN, OPEN THE PITFALL!
BUT-- WHAT OF ALGRIM!
LET HIM LIE IN GLORY FOREVER WITH THE MIGHTY THOR! SPRING THE TRAP!
WHAT NOW? THE FLOOR GIVES WAY BENEATH MY FEET TO REVEAL A YAWNING CHASM THAT SEEMINGLY HAS NO END!
AND WITH A THUNDROUS ROAR, THE ENTIRE TUNNEL COLLAPSES, CARRYING THOR AND HIS ERSTWHILE FOE OUT OF THE SIGHT OF MEN...
...PERHAPS FOREVER!
THOR!

ROGER'S CALL IS ALL BUT DROWNED OUT BY THE ROARING AVALANCHE THAT FOLLOWS THOR AND ALGRIM INTO THE BOTTOMLESS CHASM...

...AN AVALANCHE THAT SHAKES THE VERY ROOTS OF THE FAERIE KINGDOM...

...UNTIL THE LAST ECHOES HAVE DIED AWAY AND ONLY SILENCE REMAINS.

AT LAST I AM REVENGED UPON ODIN FOR MY BANISHMENT. FAREWELL, THOR.

YOU WERE NO MATCH FOR MALEKITH THE ACCURSED!

WHAT ABOUT THE WOMAN, LORD?

SHE'S YOURS, WORMWOOD. DO WITH HER WHAT YOU WILL.

BUT TREAT HER AS SHE DESERVES. AFTER ALL, HER GOLDEN MEAD ENABLED US TO DEFEAT THE GOD OF THUNDER.

I WISH TO SEE OUR OTHER MORTAL GUEST.

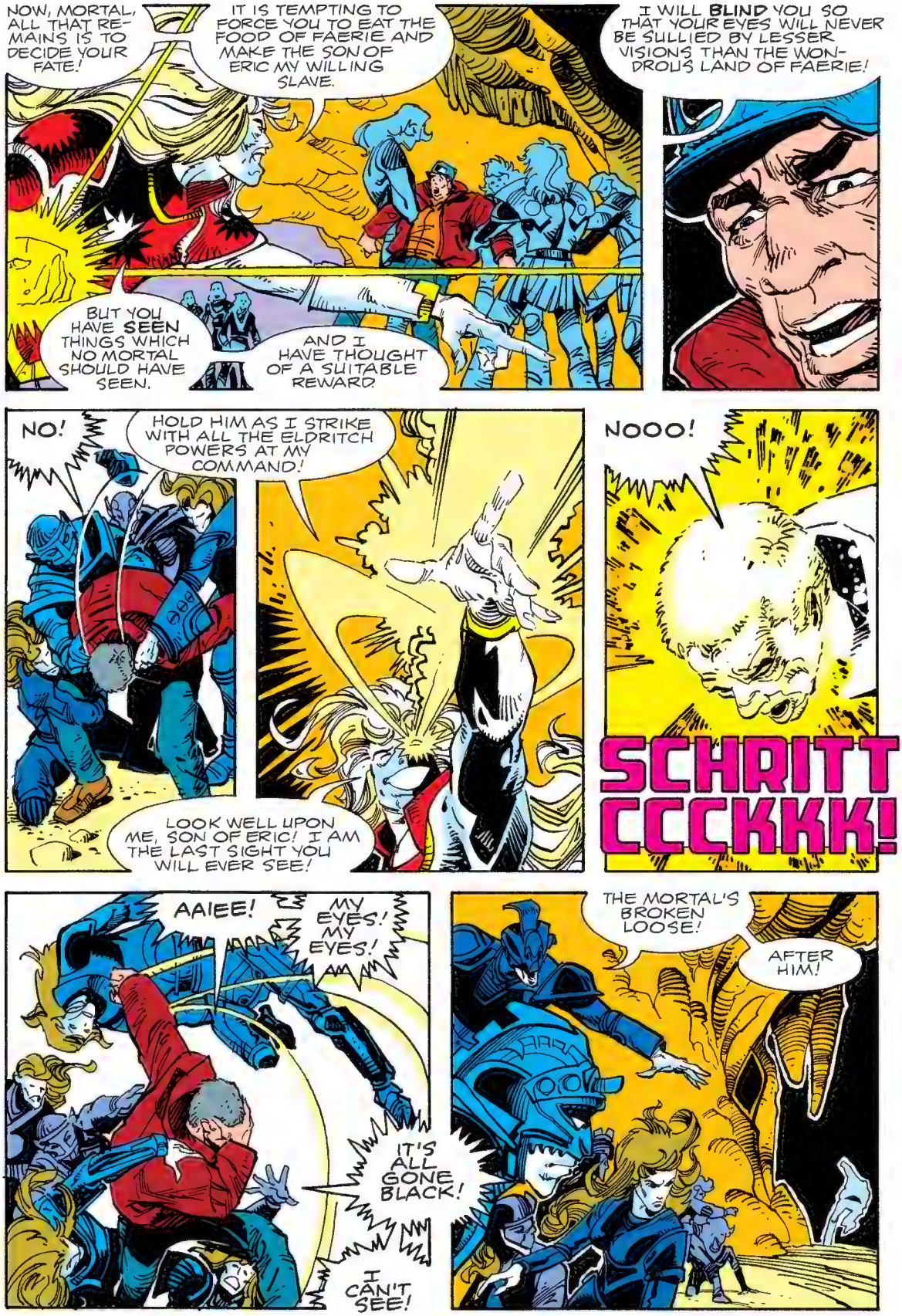
SO YOU ARE ERIC'S WHELP, EH?

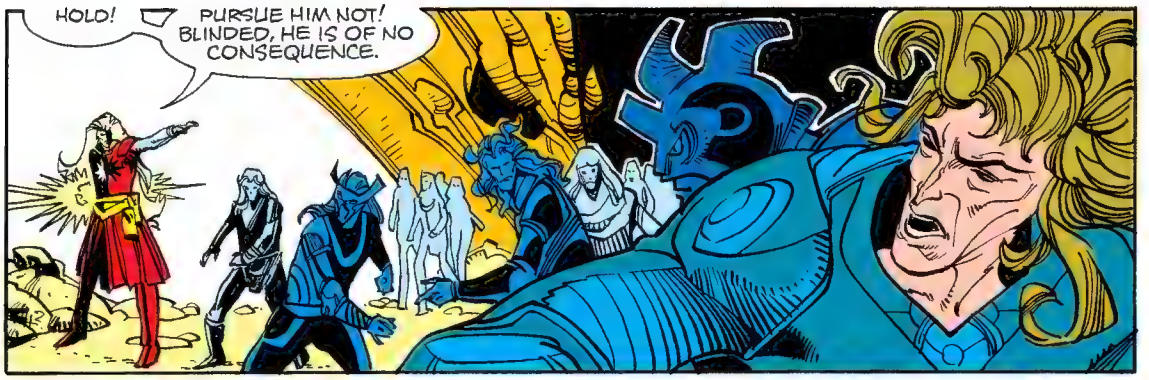
HOW APPROPRIATE THAT THE SON SHOULD RECOVER THE TREASURE WHICH HIS FATHER STOLE FROM ME SO MANY EONS AGO.

OPEN HIS KNAPSACK!

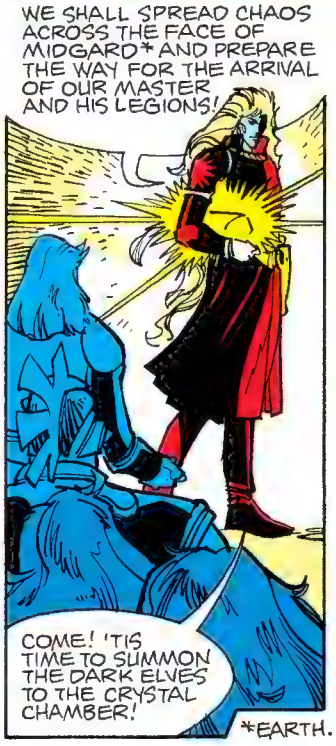
AT LAST! THE CASKET OF ANCIENT WINTERS IS MINE ONCE MORE!

AND WOE TO THE WORLD THAT IT SHOULD BE SO!

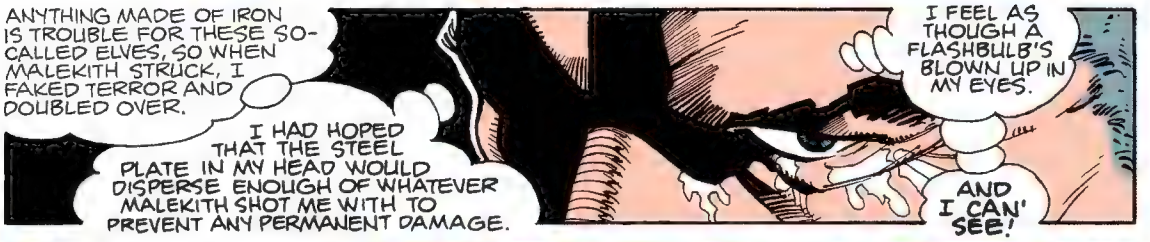

NOW, MORTAL, ALL THAT REMAINS IS TO DECIDE YOUR FATE!
IT IS TEMPTING TO FORCE YOU TO EAT THE FOOD OF FAERIE AND MAKE THE SON OF ERIC MY WILLING SLAVE.
I WILL BLIND YOU SO THAT YOUR EYES WILL NEVER BE SULLIED BY LESSER VISIONS THAN THE WONDROUS LAND OF FAERIE!
BUT YOU HAVE SEEN THINGS WHICH NO MORTAL SHOULD HAVE SEEN.
AND I HAVE THOUGHT OF A SUITABLE REWARD.
NO!
HOLD HIM AS I STRIKE WITH ALL THE ELDRITCH POWERS AT MY COMMAND!
LOOK WELL UPON ME, SON OF ERIC! I AM THE LAST SIGHT YOU WILL EVER SEE!
NOOO!
SCHRITT CCCKKK!
AAIEE!
MY EYES! MY EYES!
IT'S ALL GONE BLACK!
I CAN'T SEE!
THE MORTAL'S BROKEN LOOSE!
AFTER HIM!


HOLD!
PURSUE HIM NOT! BLINDED, HE IS OF NO CONSEQUENCE.

HE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO FIND HIS WAY OUT AND WE SHALL HAVE GREAT SPORT WITH HIM AFTER OUR WORK IS FINISHED.
FOR NOW THAT THE CASKET IS OURS ONCE MORE, WE MUST COMPLETE OUR ALL-IMPORTANT TASK.

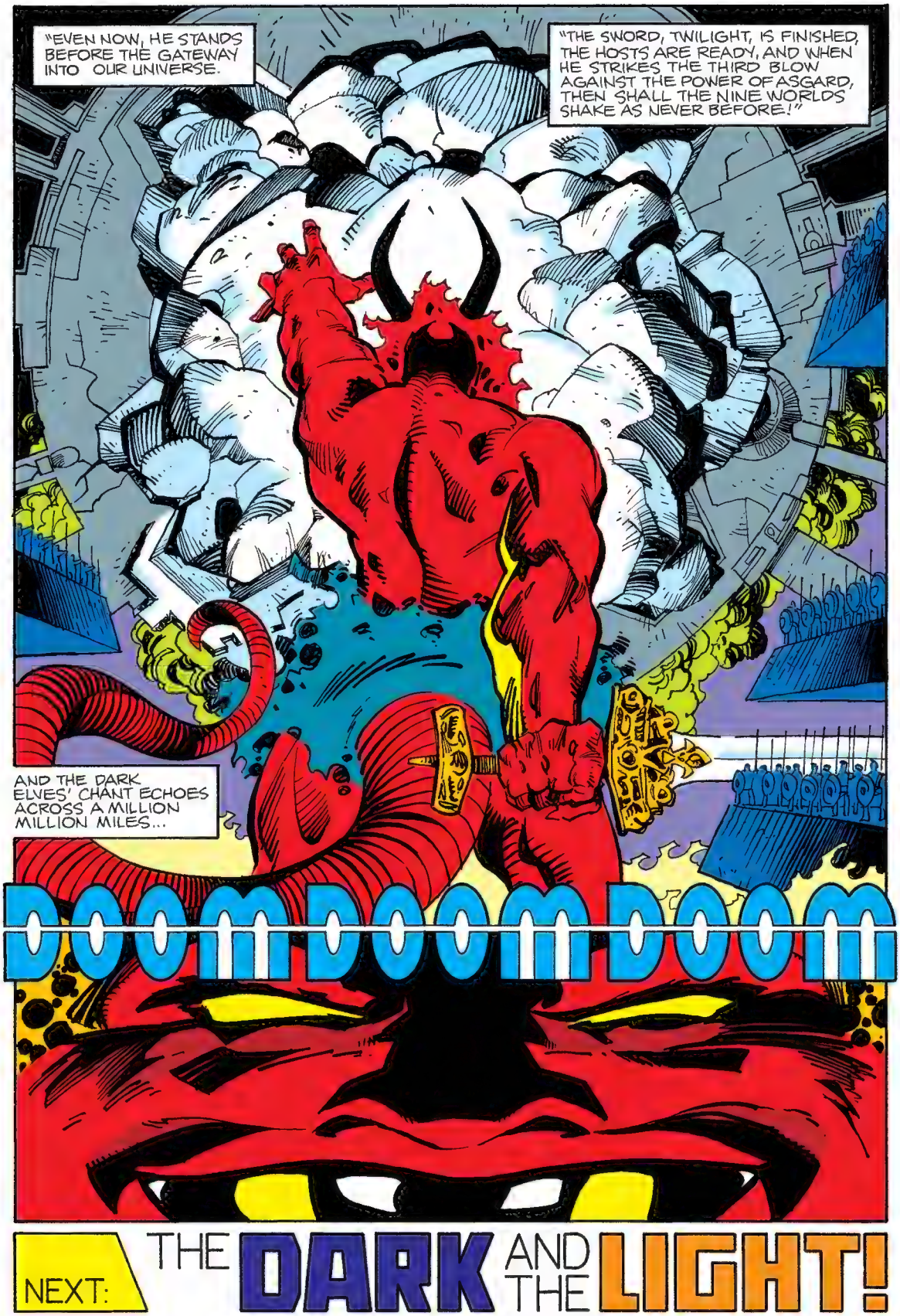

WE SHALL SPREAD CHAOS ACROSS THE FACE OF MIDGARD* AND PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE ARRIVAL OF OUR MASTER AND HIS LEGIONS!
COME! 'TIS TIME TO SUMMON THE DARK ELVES TO THE CRYSTAL CHAMBER!
*EARTH.

BUT EVEN AS THE ELVES FOLLOW MALEKITH DEEPER INTO THE BYWAYS OF FAERIE, IN A LITTLE SIDE TUNNEL NOT FAR AWAY, WE FIND...
I DON'T HEAR ANY SOUNDS OF PURSUIT.
GOOD. 'CAUSE RIGHT NOW, I'M NOT MUCH MORE THAN A SITTING DUCK.
WHOOEE! DOES MY HEAD HURT. BUT THERE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE MUCH BLEEDING.
LOOKS LIKE MY GAMBLE DIDN'T PAY OFF!


ANYTHING MADE OF IRON IS TROUBLE FOR THESE SO-CALLED ELVES, SO WHEN MALEKITH STRUCK, I FAKED TERROR AND DOUBLED OVER.
I HAD HOPED THAT THE STEEL PLATE IN MY HEAD WOULD DISPERSE ENOUGH OF WHATEVER MALEKITH SHOT ME WITH TO PREVENT ANY PERMANENT DAMAGE.
I FEEL AS THOUGH A FLASHBULB'S BLOWN UP IN MY EYES.
AND I CAN' SEE!

BUT I SWEAR, MALEKITH, I'M GONNA MAKE YOU REGRET THE DAY YOU EVER TANGLED WITH THE WILLIS FAMILY...
...AND KILLED MY FATHER!

STILL, I'D BETTER JUST TRY TO GET OUT OF HERE. AN ELF **BABY** WOULDN'T HAVE MUCH TROUBLE KNOCKING ME OVER RIGHT NOW!
THIS TUNNEL SEEMS FAIRLY DESERTED AND SLANTS UPHILL. MIGHT EVEN LEAD TO A WAY OUT OF THIS PLACE.
I WOULDN'T MIND COMING BACK HERE WITH A FEW GOOD COMPANIES OF MARINES. SHOW THESE CREEPS WHAT FIGHTING IS REALLY ABOUT.
BUT I'LL HAVE TO GET CLEAR FIRST AND-- WHUPS!
BLAST! FEELS LIKE THE TUNNEL ENDS OVERLOOKING A **CLIFF**...
...AND I'VE GOT A FEELING THINGS ARE ABOUT TO GET **WORSE** AGAIN!
I THINK I'M ABOUT TO FIND OUT JUST WHAT THE HECK IS GOING ON!
EONS AGO, ERIC WILLIS BETRAYED US AND STOLE THE CASKET. THOUGH HE DID NOT KNOW ITS SECRETS, ITS VERY POSSESSION GAVE HIM ETERNAL LIFE UNTIL I FOUND HIM!
BUT WITHOUT ITS MAGIC, I WAS UNABLE TO HIDE FROM A WRATHFUL ODIN AND SUFFERED BANISHMENT INTO BLACK LIMBO FROM WHICH OUR MASTER HAS ONLY JUST RELEASED ME!
NOW, THE MASTER HAS NEED OF THE CASKET'S POWER AND WE, HIS WILLING SERVANTS, ANSWER HIM THUS!
HAIL TO HIM WHO IS THE OLDEST, MOST POWERFUL OF ALL! IN THE DARKNESS WE WORSHIP HIM!
HE WILL BRING THE FIERY LIGHT AND BLIND HIS ENEMIES AS WE HAVE BLINDED OURS!
TONIGHT, WE SHALL OPEN THE CASKET OF ANCIENT WINTERS AND RELEASE UPON THE EARTH THE CURSE OF ICE THAT THE DESTROYING FIRE MAY COME...
...AND TOGETHER, THEY SHALL CLEANSE THE WORLD, REMAKING IT IN A BRIGHTER, DARKER IMAGE!


"EVEN NOW, HE STANDS BEFORE THE GATEWAY INTO OUR UNIVERSE.
"THE SWORD, TWILIGHT, IS FINISHED, THE HOSTS ARE READY, AND WHEN HE STRIKES THE THIRD BLOW AGAINST THE POWER OF ASGARD, THEN SHALL THE NINE WORLDS SHAKE AS NEVER BEFORE!"
AND THE DARK ELVES' CHANT ECHOES ACROSS A MILLION MILLION MILES...
DOOMDOOMDOOM
NEXT: THE DARK AND THE LIGHT!

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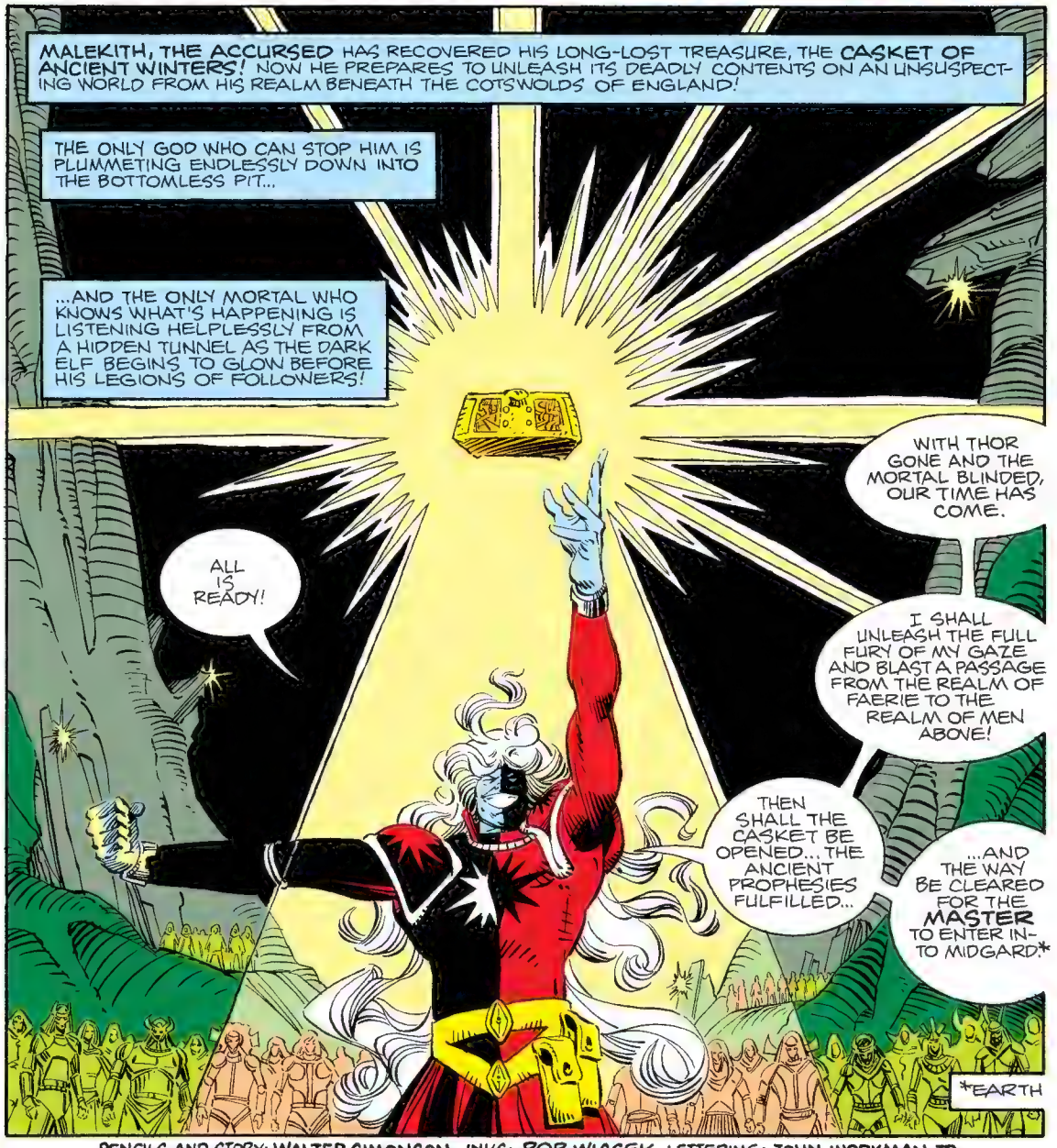
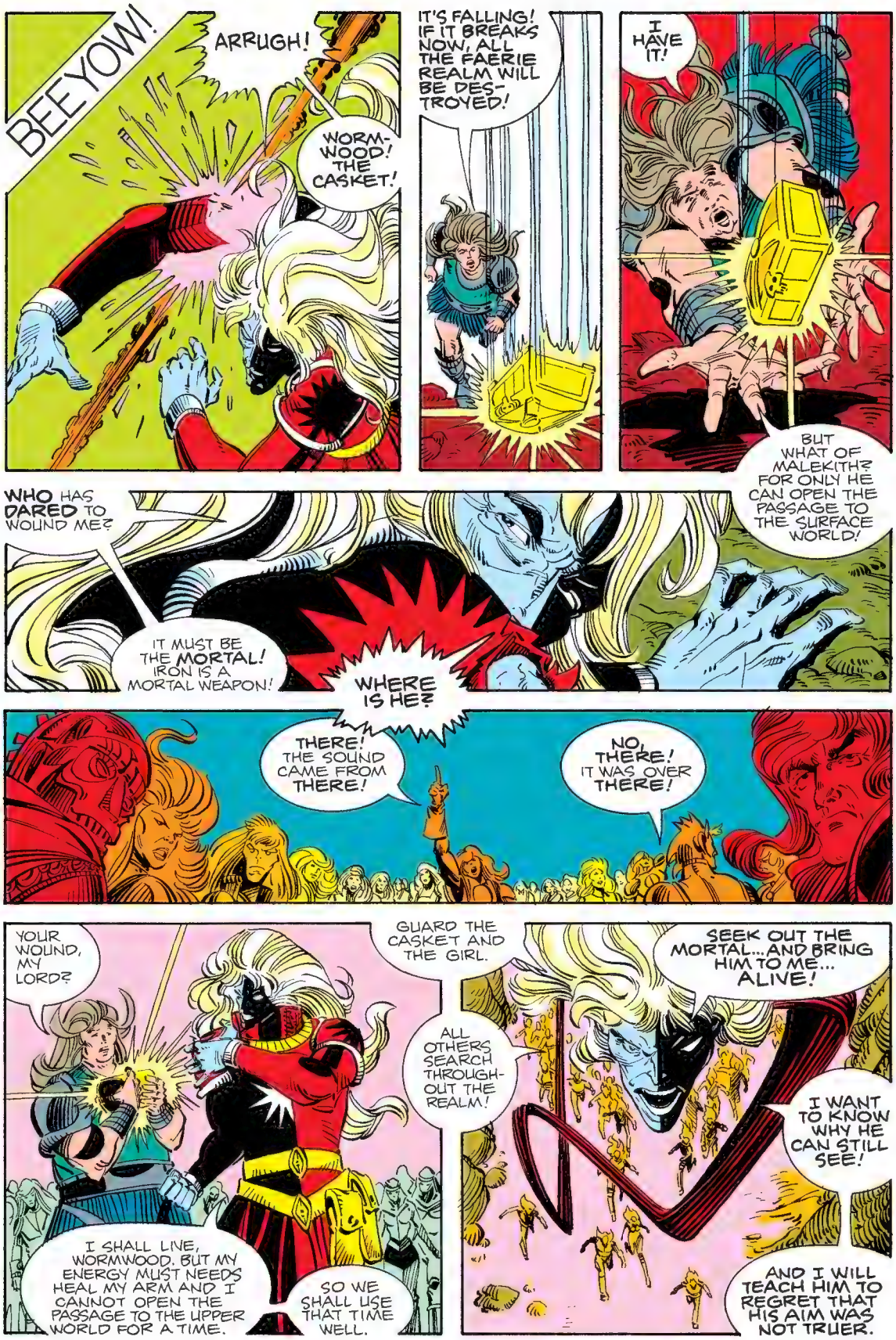
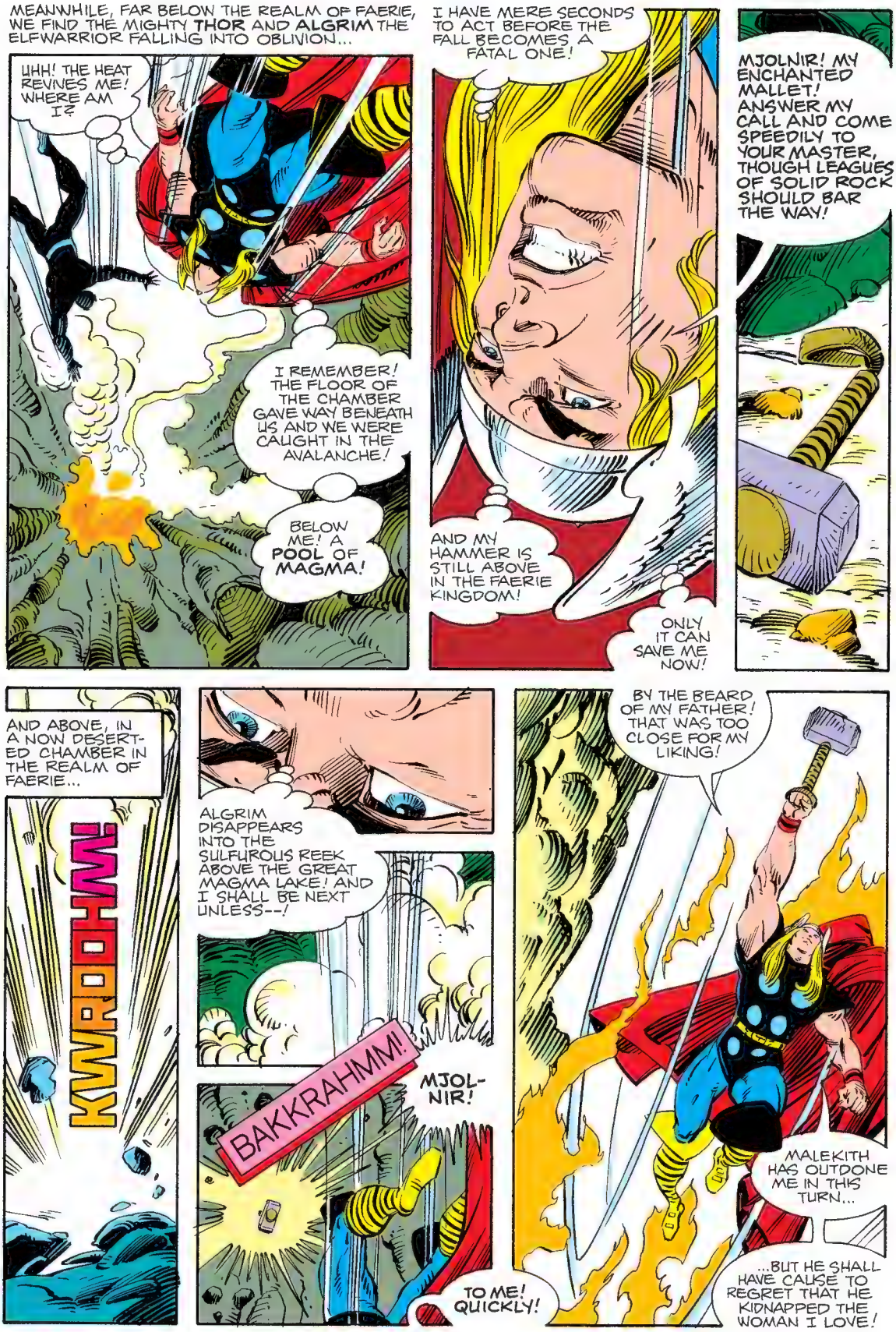
THE DARK AND THE LIGHT


MALEKITH, THE ACCURSED HAS RECOVERED HIS LONG-LOST TREASURE, THE CASKET OF ANCIENT WINTERS! NOW HE PREPARES TO UNLEASH ITS DEADLY CONTENTS ON AN UNSUSPECTING WORLD FROM HIS REALM BENEATH THE COTSWOLDS OF ENGLAND!
THE ONLY GOD WHO CAN STOP HIM IS PLUMMETING ENDLESSLY DOWN INTO THE BOTTOMLESS PIT...
...AND THE ONLY MORTAL WHO KNOWS WHAT'S HAPPENING IS LISTENING HELPLESSLY FROM A HIDDEN TUNNEL AS THE DARK ELF BEGINS TO GLOW BEFORE HIS LEGIONS OF FOLLOWERS!
ALL IS READY!
WITH THOR GONE AND THE MORTAL BLINDED, OUR TIME HAS COME.
I SHALL UNLEASH THE FULL FURY OF MY GAZE AND BLAST A PASSAGE FROM THE REALM OF FAERIE TO THE REALM OF MEN ABOVE!
THEN SHALL THE CASKET BE OPENED... THE ANCIENT PROPHESIES FULFILLED...
...AND THE WAY BE CLEARED FOR THE MASTER TO ENTER INTO MIDGARD!*
*EARTH

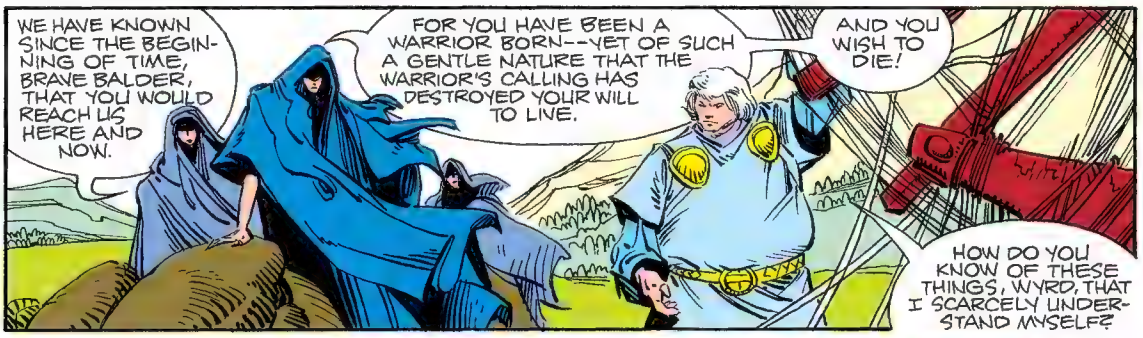
PENCILS AND STORY: WALTER SIMONSON INKS: BOB WIACEK LETTERING: JOHN WORKMAN JR.
COLORS: CHRISTIE SCHEELE EDITING: MARK GRUENWALD EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: JIM SHOOTER

AND ABOVE, HIDDEN FROM MALEKITH'S GAZE, ROGER WILLIS STARES INTO THE GREAT CRYSTAL CAVERN AND REALIZES...
MY SIGHT! IT'S COMING BACK! I CAN SEE AGAIN!
IT DID WORK! THE STEEL PLATE IN MY HEAD DISPERSED ENOUGH OF MALEKITH'S MAGIC TO SAVE MY EYES!
BUT THOUGH I CAN HEAR THE BLASTED FAERIES, I CAN'T SEE ANY OF THEM!
MY SIGHT HAS BEEN SAVED, BUT MALEKITH HAS DESTROYED MY FAERIE VISION!
THERE'S MELODI, THE WOMAN THOR AND I CAME TO RESCUE!
AND I CAN SEE THE CASKET FLOATING ABOVE THE DAIS!
MALEKITH MUST BE RIGHT BELOW IT. THAT BURNING LIGHT HAS TO BE COMING FROM HIS EVIL EYE!
HE'S BUILDING POWER TO BLOW THROUGH THE ROOF OF THE CAVERN AND RELEASE THE CASKET'S CONTENTS!
I'VE A SINGLE BULLET LEFT!
AND AS IRON IS THE BANE OF FAERIES, I HOPE IT'S GOT YOUR NAME ON IT, MALEKITH!
BY THE POWER WITHIN ME, I RELEASE THE LONG CHAINED DAYS OF MID-GARD'S GLACIAL AGES!
THOUGH IT MAY COST BOTH ME AND THE GIRL OUR LIVES, I CAN'T LET HIM DO IT!
THE TIME IS NOW!
NOW!
BLAM!

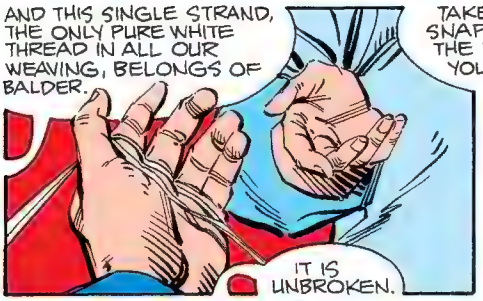

BEEYOW!
ARRUGH!
WORM-WOOD! THE CASKET!
IT'S FALLING! IF IT BREAKS NOW, ALL THE FAERIE REALM WILL BE DES-TROYED!
I HAVE IT!
BUT WHAT OF MALEKITH? FOR ONLY HE CAN OPEN THE PASSAGE TO THE SURFACE WORLD!
WHO HAS DARED TO WOUND ME?
IT MUST BE THE MORTAL! IRON IS A MORTAL WEAPON!
WHERE IS HE?
THERE! THE SOUND CAME FROM THERE!
NO, THERE! IT WAS OVER THERE!
YOUR WOUND, MY LORD?
GUARD THE CASKET AND THE GIRL.
ALL OTHERS SEARCH THROUGH-OUT THE REALM!
SEEK OUT THE MORTAL... AND BRING HIM TO ME... ALIVE!
I WANT TO KNOW WHY HE CAN STILL SEE!
AND I WILL TEACH HIM TO REGRET THAT HIS AIM WAS NOT TRUER.
I SHALL LIVE, WORMWOOD. BUT MY ENERGY MUST NEEDS HEAL MY ARM AND I CANNOT OPEN THE PASSAGE TO THE UPPER WORLD FOR A TIME.
SO WE SHALL USE THAT TIME WELL.

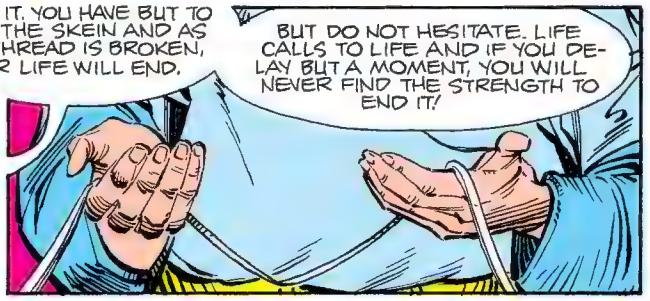

MEANWHILE, FAR BELOW THE REALM OF FAERIE, WE FIND THE MIGHTY THOR AND ALGRIM THE ELFWARRIOR FALLING INTO OBLIVION...
UHH! THE HEAT REVIVES ME! WHERE AM I?
I REMEMBER! THE FLOOR OF THE CHAMBER GAVE WAY BENEATH US AND WE WERE CAUGHT IN THE AVALANCHE!
BELOW ME! A POOL OF MAGMA!
I HAVE MERE SECONDS TO ACT BEFORE THE FALL BECOMES A FATAL ONE!
AND MY HAMMER IS STILL ABOVE IN THE FAERIE KINGDOM!
ONLY IT CAN SAVE ME NOW!
MJOLNIR! MY ENCHANTED MALLET! ANSWER MY CALL AND COME SPEEDILY TO YOUR MASTER, THOUGH LEAGUES OF SOLID ROCK SHOULD BAR THE WAY!
AND ABOVE, IN A NOW DESERTED CHAMBER IN THE REALM OF FAERIE...
KWRROHM!
ALGRIM DISAPPEARS INTO THE SULFUROUS REEK ABOVE THE GREAT MAGMA LAKE! AND I SHALL BE NEXT UNLESS--!
BAKKRAHMM!
MJOLNIR!
TO ME! QUICKLY!
BY THE BEARD OF MY FATHER! THAT WAS TOO CLOSE FOR MY LIKING!
MALEKITH HAS OUTDONE ME IN THIS TURN...
...BUT HE SHALL HAVE CAUSE TO REGRET THAT HE KIDNAPPED THE WOMAN I LOVE!

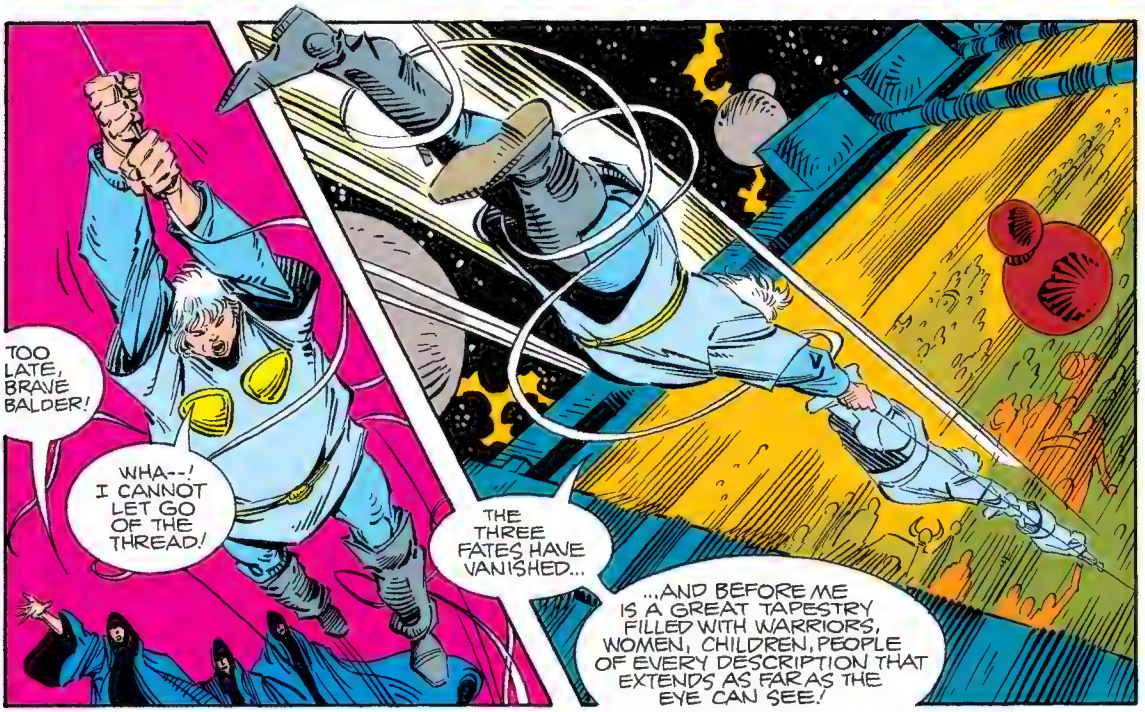
AS THOR HURTLES ANGRILY UPWARD, BALDER THE BRAVE CONFRONTS THE LEGENDARY NORNS IN A VALLEY FAR BEYOND INHABITED LANDS...

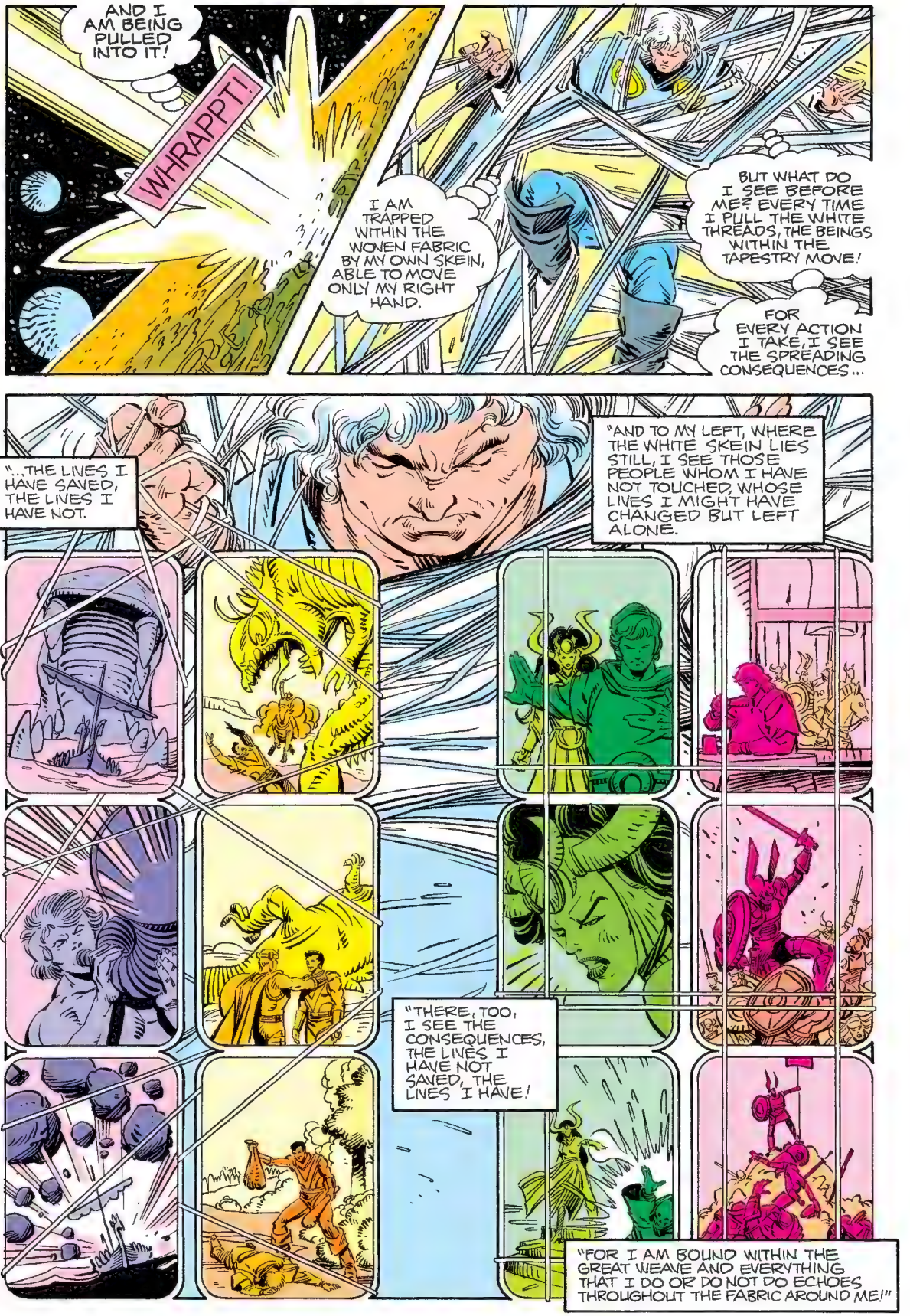

WE HAVE KNOWN SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME, BRAVE BALDER, THAT YOU WOULD REACH US HERE AND NOW.
FOR YOU HAVE BEEN A WARRIOR BORN--YET OF SUCH A GENTLE NATURE THAT THE WARRIOR'S CALLING HAS DESTROYED YOUR WILL TO LIVE.
AND YOU WISH TO DIE!
HOW DO YOU KNOW OF THESE THINGS, WYRD, THAT I SCARCELY UNDERSTAND MYSELF?

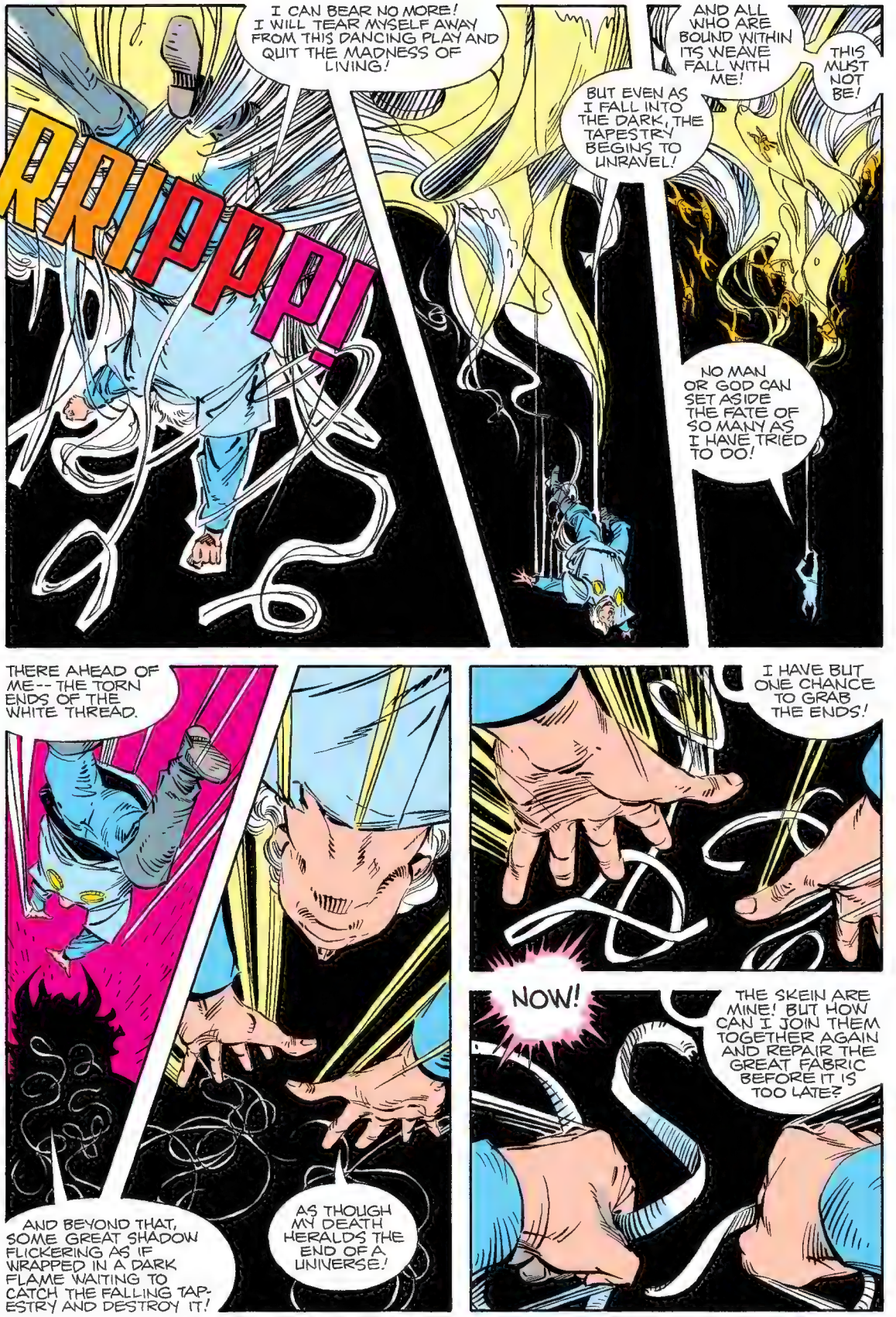
*THE REASON FOR BALDER'S SURPRISE CAN BE FOUND IN THOR 344.

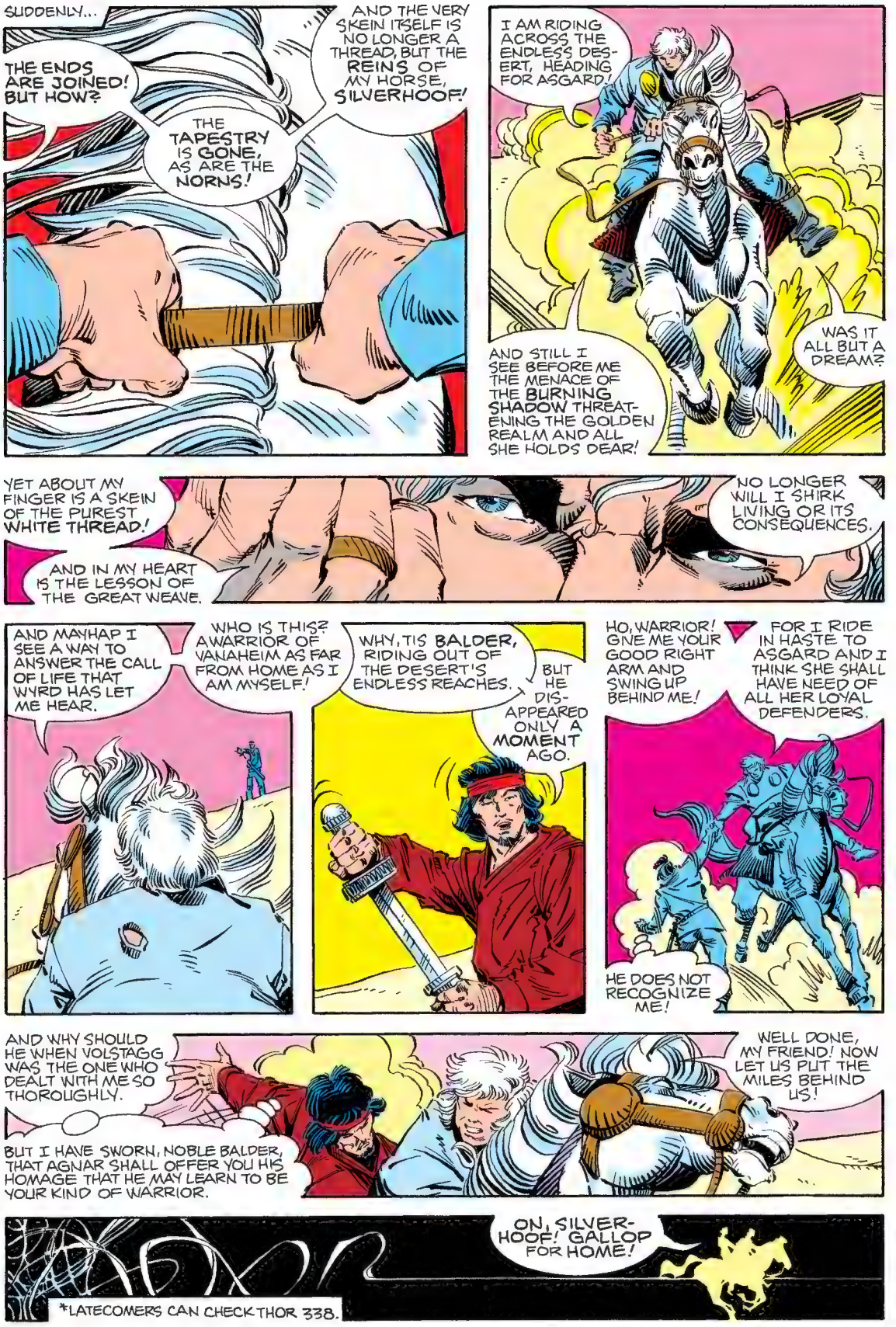



TAKE IT. YOU HAVE BUT TO SNAP THE SKEIN AND AS THE THREAD IS BROKEN, YOUR LIFE WILL END.
BUT DO NOT HESITATE. LIFE CALLS TO LIFE AND IF YOU DELAY BUT A MOMENT, YOU WILL NEVER FIND THE STRENGTH TO END IT!


TOO LATE, BRAVE BALDER!
WHA--! I CANNOT LET GO OF THE THREAD!
THE THREE FATES HAVE VANISHED...
...AND BEFORE ME IS A GREAT TAPESTRY FILLED WITH WARRIORS, WOMEN, CHILDREN, PEOPLE OF EVERY DESCRIPTION THAT EXTENDS AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE!

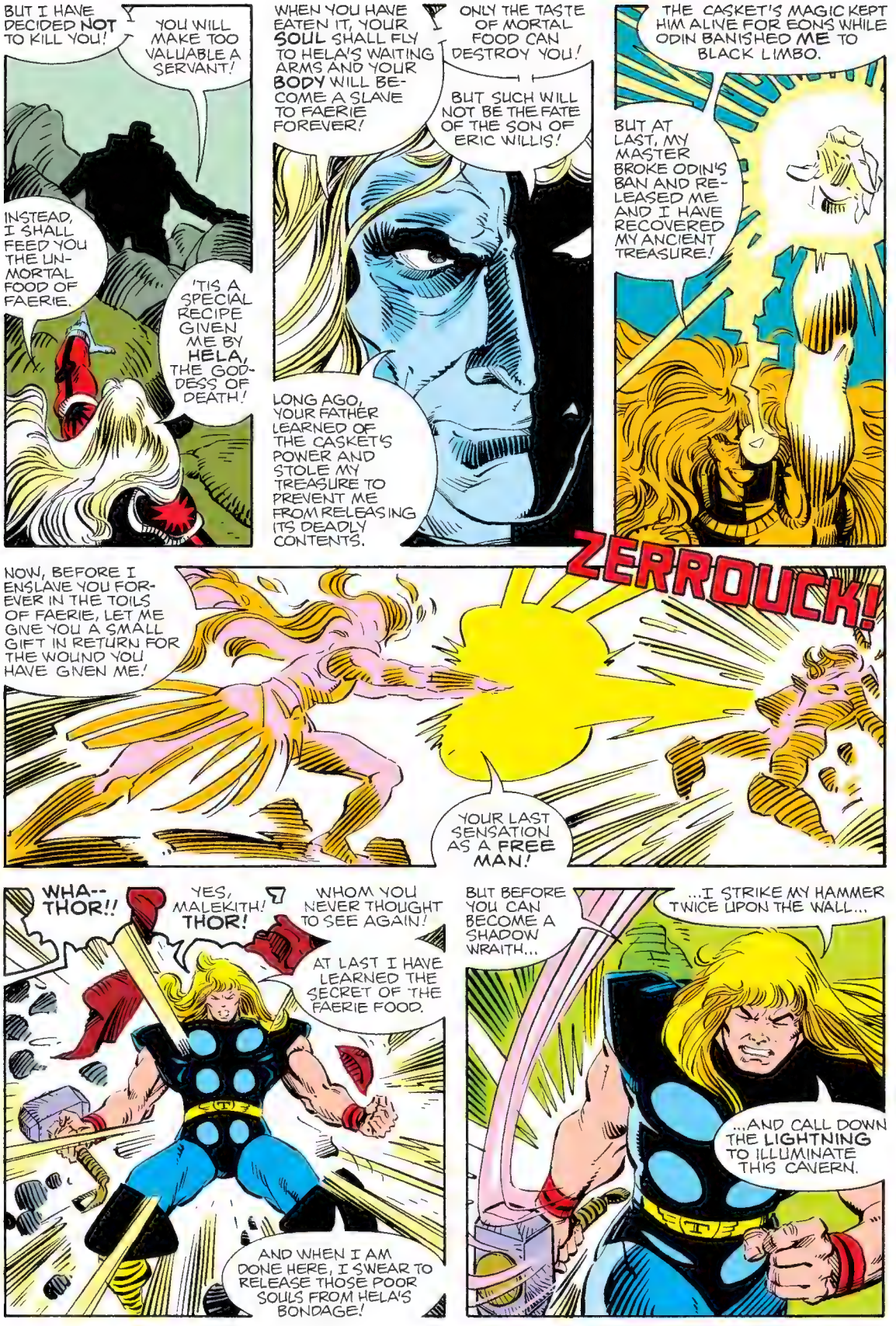

AND I AM BEING PULLED INTO IT!
WHRAPPT!
I AM TRAPPED WITHIN THE WOVEN FABRIC BY MY OWN SKEIN, ABLE TO MOVE ONLY MY RIGHT HAND.
BUT WHAT DO I SEE BEFORE ME? EVERY TIME I PULL THE WHITE THREADS, THE BEINGS WITHIN THE TAPESTRY MOVE!
FOR EVERY ACTION I TAKE, I SEE THE SPREADING CONSEQUENCES...
"...THE LIVES I HAVE SAVED, THE LIVES I HAVE NOT.
"AND TO MY LEFT, WHERE THE WHITE SKEIN LIES STILL, I SEE THOSE PEOPLE WHOM I HAVE NOT TOUCHED, WHOSE LIVES I MIGHT HAVE CHANGED BUT LEFT ALONE.
"THERE, TOO, I SEE THE CONSEQUENCES, THE LIVES I HAVE NOT SAVED, THE LIVES I HAVE!
"FOR I AM BOUND WITHIN THE GREAT WEAVE AND EVERYTHING THAT I DO OR DO NOT DO ECHOES THROUGHOUT THE FABRIC AROUND ME!"


I CAN BEAR NO MORE! I WILL TEAR MYSELF AWAY FROM THIS DANCING PLAY AND QUIT THE MADNESS OF LIVING!
RRIPPP!
BUT EVEN AS I FALL INTO THE DARK, THE TAPESTRY BEGINS TO UNRAVEL!
AND ALL WHO ARE BOUND WITHIN ITS WEAVE FALL WITH ME!
THIS MUST NOT BE!
NO MAN OR GOD CAN SET ASIDE THE FATE OF SO MANY AS I HAVE TRIED TO DO!
THERE AHEAD OF ME-- THE TORN ENDS OF THE WHITE THREAD.
AND BEYOND THAT, SOME GREAT SHADOW FLICKERING AS IF WRAPPED IN A DARK FLAME WAITING TO CATCH THE FALLING TAPESTRY AND DESTROY IT!
AS THOUGH MY DEATH HERALDS THE END OF A UNIVERSE!
I HAVE BUT ONE CHANCE TO GRAB THE ENDS!
NOW!
THE SKEIN ARE MINE! BUT HOW CAN I JOIN THEM TOGETHER AGAIN AND REPAIR THE GREAT FABRIC BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE?


SUDDENLY...
THE ENDS ARE JOINED! BUT HOW?
THE TAPESTRY IS GONE, AS ARE THE NORNS!
AND THE VERY SKEIN ITSELF IS NO LONGER A THREAD, BUT THE REINS OF MY HORSE, SILVERHOOF!
I AM RIDING ACROSS THE ENDLESS DESERT, HEADING FOR ASGARD!
WAS IT ALL BUT A DREAM?
AND STILL I SEE BEFORE ME THE MENACE OF THE BURNING SHADOW THREATENING THE GOLDEN REALM AND ALL SHE HOLDS DEAR!
YET ABOUT MY FINGER IS A SKEIN OF THE PUREST WHITE THREAD!
AND IN MY HEART IS THE LESSON OF THE GREAT WEAVE.
NO LONGER WILL I SHIRK LIVING OR ITS CONSEQUENCES.
AND MAYHAP I SEE A WAY TO ANSWER THE CALL OF LIFE THAT WYRD HAS LET ME HEAR.
WHO IS THIS? A WARRIOR OF VANAHEIM AS FAR FROM HOME AS I AM MYSELF!
WHY, TIS BALDER, RIDING OUT OF THE DESERT'S ENDLESS REACHES.
BUT HE DISAPPEARED ONLY A MOMENT AGO.
HO, WARRIOR! GIVE ME YOUR GOOD RIGHT ARM AND SWING UP BEHIND ME!
FOR I RIDE IN HASTE TO ASGARD AND I THINK SHE SHALL HAVE NEED OF ALL HER LOYAL DEFENDERS.
HE DOES NOT RECOGNIZE ME!
AND WHY SHOULD HE WHEN VOLSTAGG WAS THE ONE WHO DEALT WITH ME SO THOROUGHLY.
BUT I HAVE SWORN, NOBLE BALDER, THAT AGNAR SHALL OFFER YOU HIS HOMAGE THAT HE MAY LEARN TO BE YOUR KIND OF WARRIOR.
WELL DONE, MY FRIEND! NOW LET US PUT THE MILES BEHIND US!
ON, SILVERHOOF! GALLOP FOR HOME!
*LATECOMERS CAN CHECK THOR 338.

MEANWHILE, IN THE REALM OF FAERIE...
THIS IS IT! I'VE FOUND THE CHAMBER!
BENEATH THAT PILE OF BOULDERS IS THE PIT WHERE THOR FELL.
I... I GUESS THERE ISN'T ANY HOPE HE'S STILL ALIVE.
AND THERE'S HIS ONLY MARKER!
MY HAT.
STILL IN THE DIRT WHERE IT FELL DURING OUR STRUGGLE WITH THE ELVISH WARRIORS OF MALEKITH.
IF I MAKE IT OUT, THOR, I'LL COME BACK AND WIPE THIS PLACE OFF THE FACE OF THE EARTH, I PROMISE YOU.
SLEEP WELL.
UH-OH! I HEAR A RUMBLE OFF IN THE DISTANCE. TIME TO GET ROLLING AND HEAD FOR HOME!
I DON'T WANT TO RUN INTO ANY OF THESE GUYS WHEN I CAN'T SEE THEM!
BRAAAAM!
HOLY--!
THOR!

AYE, ROGER! THOR!
YOU SURE KNOW HOW TO MAKE A DRAMATIC ENTRANCE.
YOU OKAY?
I AM SORRY TO HAVE FAILED YOU BEFORE, ROGER.
THE SON OF ODIN IS NOT USED TO FAILURE, AND YET WHEN I SAW MELODI IN DANGER, ALL OTHER THOUGHTS SEEMED TO FLEE FROM MY MIND.
WHAT HAS HAPPENED DURING MY FALL?
IN 25 WORDS OR LESS, MALEKITH'S GOT THE CASKET, I WINGED HIM, AND HE AND HIS BRAVOS ARE SEARCHING THE CAVES FOR ME.
I DIDN'T KILL HIM, WORSE LUCK.
AND MELODI?
"IN THE CAVE WITH THE CASKET UNDER GUARD, LAST TIME I LOOKED. I BEAT A STRATEGIC RETREAT AFTER I TOOK MY SHOT."
"MALEKITH MAY ALREADY HAVE SENSED MY PRESENCE AND IF HE LEARNS THAT THOR IS STILL ALIVE, HE WILL NOT COME CLOSE ENOUGH FOR US TO GRAPPLE WITH HIM.
"GIVEN HIS ABILITY TO MERGE INTO THE SHADOWS, HE COULD BE MOST DIFFICULT TO CAPTURE.
AND, INDEED...
STRANGE! I FEEL A PRESENCE BEFORE ME IN THE CAVE OF THE BOTTOMLESS PIT!
IT HAS A MORTAL SMELL AND MORE BESIDES.
SOME LINGERING TRACE OF THE GOD OF THUNDER, PERHAPS!
I SHALL SPEED TO THE CAVE AND CONFRONT MY GUEST!
A MOMENT LATER...
WE MEET AGAIN, ROGER WILLIS!
AND THIS TIME, NEITHER COLD IRON NOR THUNDER GOD SHALL SAVE YOU.


BUT I HAVE DECIDED NOT TO KILL YOU!
YOU WILL MAKE TOO VALUABLE A SERVANT!
INSTEAD, I SHALL FEED YOU THE UN-MORTAL FOOD OF FAERIE.
'TIS A SPECIAL RECIPE GIVEN ME BY HELA, THE GOD-DESS OF DEATH!
WHEN YOU HAVE EATEN IT, YOUR SOUL SHALL FLY TO HELA'S WAITING ARMS AND YOUR BODY WILL BE-COME A SLAVE TO FAERIE FOREVER!
ONLY THE TASTE OF MORTAL FOOD CAN DESTROY YOU!
BUT SUCH WILL NOT BE THE FATE OF THE SON OF ERIC WILLIS!
LONG AGO, YOUR FATHER LEARNED OF THE CASKET'S POWER AND STOLE MY TREASURE TO PREVENT ME FROM RELEASING ITS DEADLY CONTENTS.
THE CASKET'S MAGIC KEPT HIM ALIVE FOR EONS WHILE ODIN BANISHED ME TO BLACK LIMBO.
BUT AT LAST, MY MASTER BROKE ODIN'S BAN AND RE-LEASED ME AND I HAVE RECOVERED MY ANCIENT TREASURE!
NOW, BEFORE I ENSLAVE YOU FOR-EVER IN THE TOILS OF FAERIE, LET ME GIVE YOU A SMALL GIFT IN RETURN FOR THE WOUND YOU HAVE GIVEN ME!
ZERROUCK!
YOUR LAST SENSATION AS A FREE MAN!
WHA-- THOR!!
YES, MALEKITH! THOR!
WHOM YOU NEVER THOUGHT TO SEE AGAIN!
AT LAST I HAVE LEARNED THE SECRET OF THE FAERIE FOOD.
AND WHEN I AM DONE HERE, I SWEAR TO RELEASE THOSE POOR SOULS FROM HELA'S BONDAGE!
BUT BEFORE YOU CAN BECOME A SHADOW WRAITH...
...I STRIKE MY HAMMER TWICE UPON THE WALL...
...AND CALL DOWN THE LIGHTNING TO ILLUMINATE THIS CAVERN.

BAADOOM MOOOMM!
NOOOO!
FOR WHERE THERE ARE NO SHADOWS, THERE IS NO ESCAPE FOR THE DARK ELF!
THE DARKNESS HAS FLED, MALEKITH! SAVE YOURSELF IF YOU CAN!
BRAWHAM!
A WELL-AIMED BLOW, THUNDERER! BUT ONLY AGAINST AN IMMOVABLE OBJECT!
BUT STILL I AM A SHAPE-CHANGER!
SCHRIKKTH!
PERHAPS I CANNOT ESCAPE INTO THE SHADOWS AS I AM WONT TO DO.
AND STILL I AM THE MASTER OF MY DOMAIN!

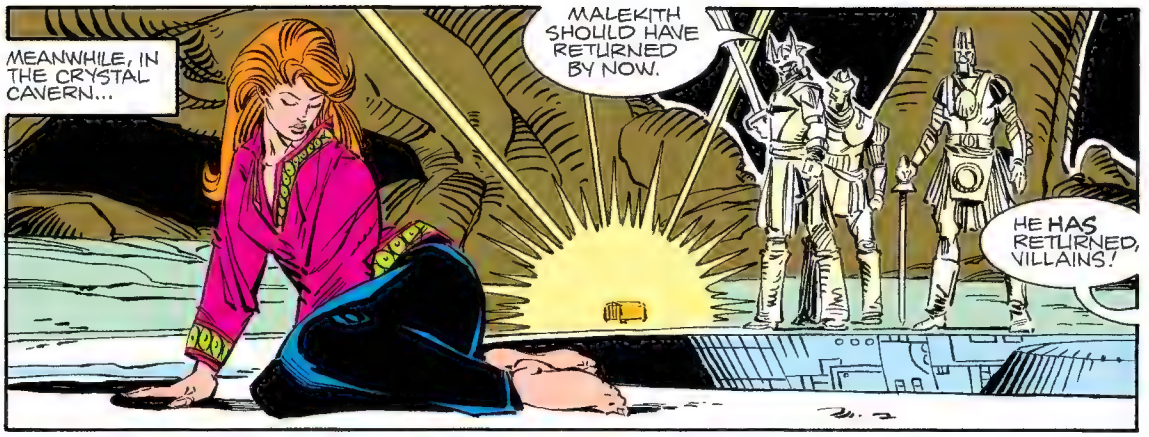
ONLY A MASTER OF EVIL, MALEKITH!
FOR THOUGH YOU HAVE TAKEN THE SHAPE OF A TRULY FEARSOME WARRIOR, 'TIS THOR WHO HAS THE POWER HERE!
THOR WHOM YOU HAVE WRONGED!
KEERASH!
THOR WHOM YOU HAVE TRIED TO DESTROY!
THRAUUAHNN!
THOR WHOSE LADY YOU HAVE STOLEN FOR THE SAKE OF RANSOM AND BETRAYAL!
BUUAKKTH!
AND THOR WHO WILL HAVE HIS VENGEANCE...
THKASSH!
...UPON THE DARK ELF AND ALL WHO FOLLOW HIM!
UH, THOR, I DON'T THINK HE CAN HEAR YOU ANYMORE.
AND I WISH TO SEE MELODI. LET ME SHOULDER THE UNCONSCIOUS MALEKITH AND THEN, ROGER, YOU SHALL LEAD ME TO BOTH MELODI AND THE CASKET.
WHAT?
OH.
VERY WELL. LET THE LIGHTNING CEASE!
WE SHALL TAKE HIM WITH US. MY FATHER WILL NO DOUBT WISH TO SEE HIM!

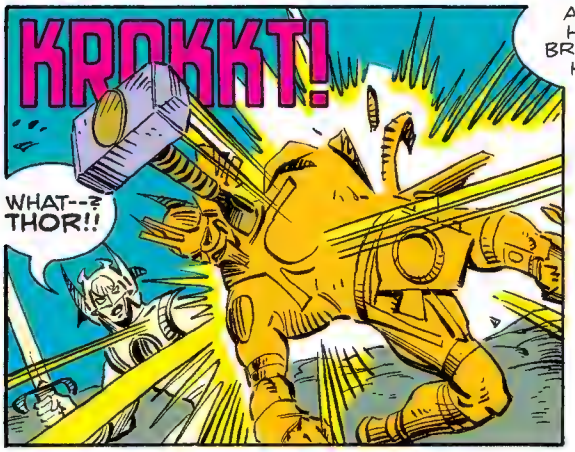
AS THOR AND ROGER BEGIN THEIR SEARCH, THE ASSEMBLING OF THE HOSTS OF ASGARD, ORDERED BY ODIN HIMSELF, BEGINS...

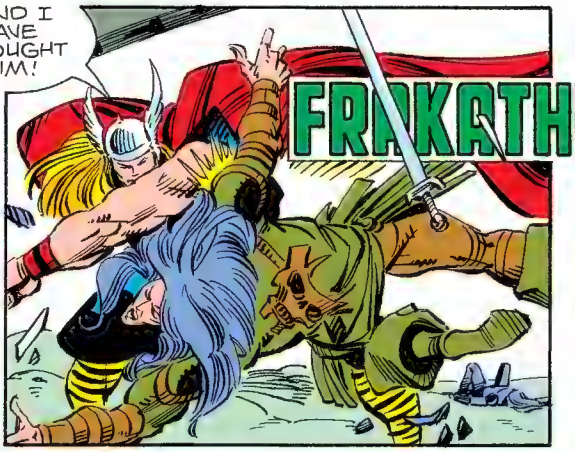
AN ENCAMPMENT HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED ON THE BATTLE PLAIN OF VIGRID AND THERE SHALL WE GATHER TO AWAIT OUR FULL STRENGTH.
THERE, TOO, SHALL ODIN COME TO GREET THE FLOWER OF ASGARD IN THEIR GLORY!
SO FOLLOW FANDRAL THE DASHING WHILST MY COMPANIONS AWAIT THE COMING OF THE NEXT HOST.

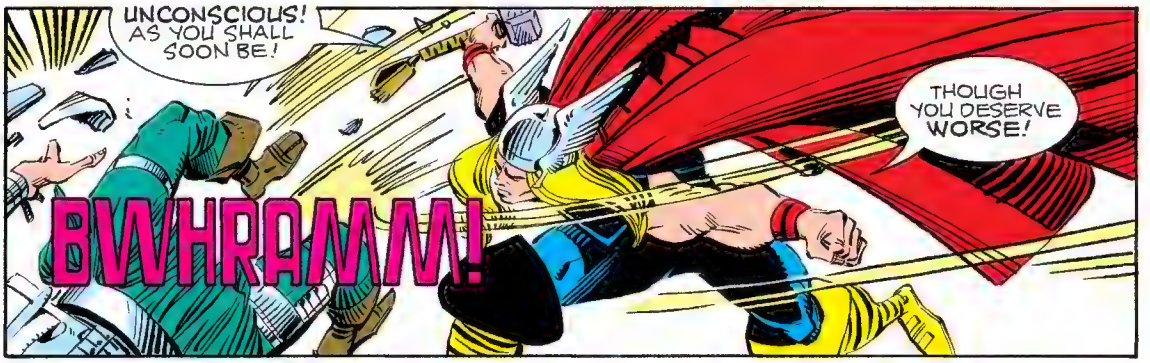
FANDRAL, HOGUN, AND VOLSTAGG HAVE DONE WELL, MY LORD. THE ARMIES OF ASGARD AND HER ALLIES GROW STEADILY LARGER AS THE DAYS PASS.
YES, MY FAITHFUL CHAMBERLAIN. OUR NUMBERS INCREASE.

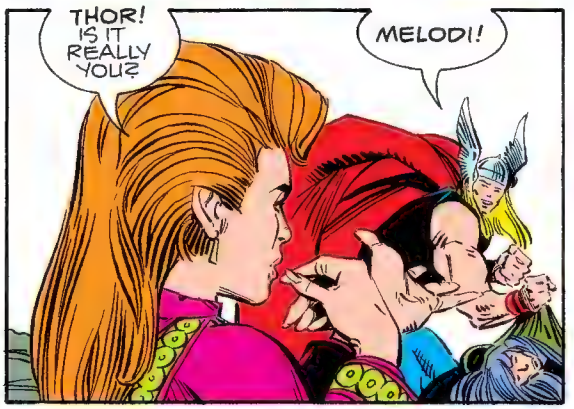
AND YET I FEAR THAT IN THEIR FULLNESS, THEY SHALL NOT EQUAL A TENTH THE NUMBER OF OUR ENEMIES.
ORDER MY ARMOR BE MADE READY. IT IS TIME FOR ODIN TO PREPARE HIMSELF FOR WHAT MUST BE.

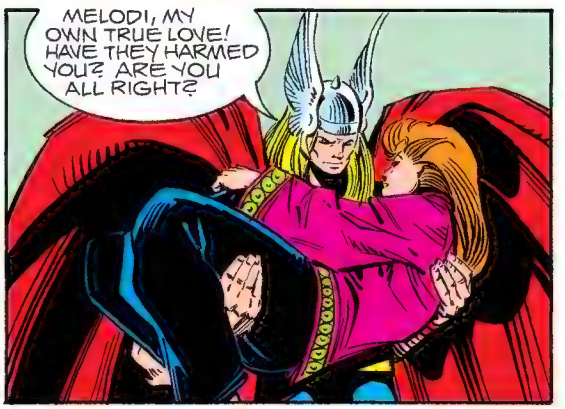

MEANWHILE, IN THE CRYSTAL CAVERN...
MALEKITH SHOULD HAVE RETURNED BY NOW.
HE HAS RETURNED, VILLAINS!

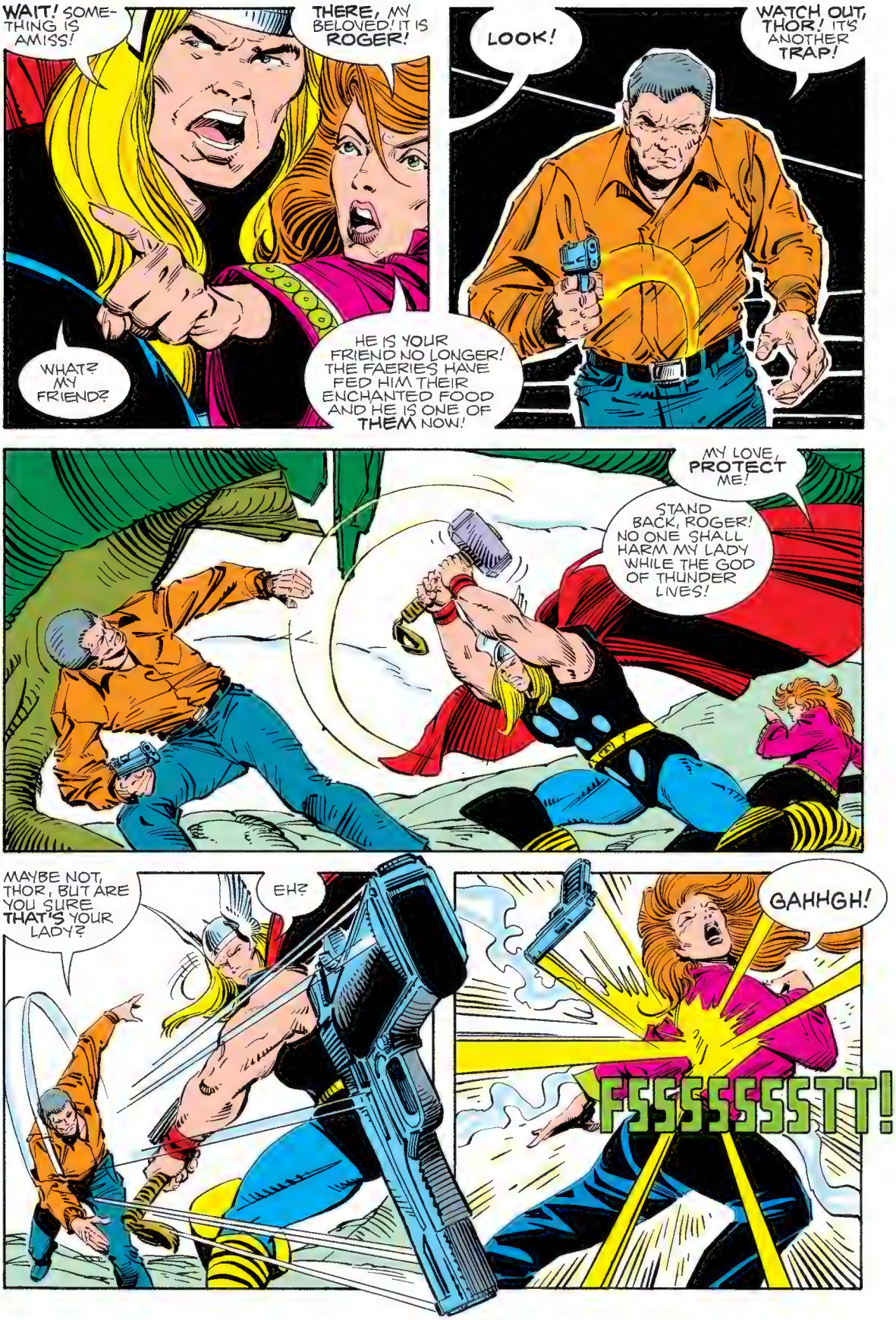

KRAKKT!
WHAT--? THOR!!

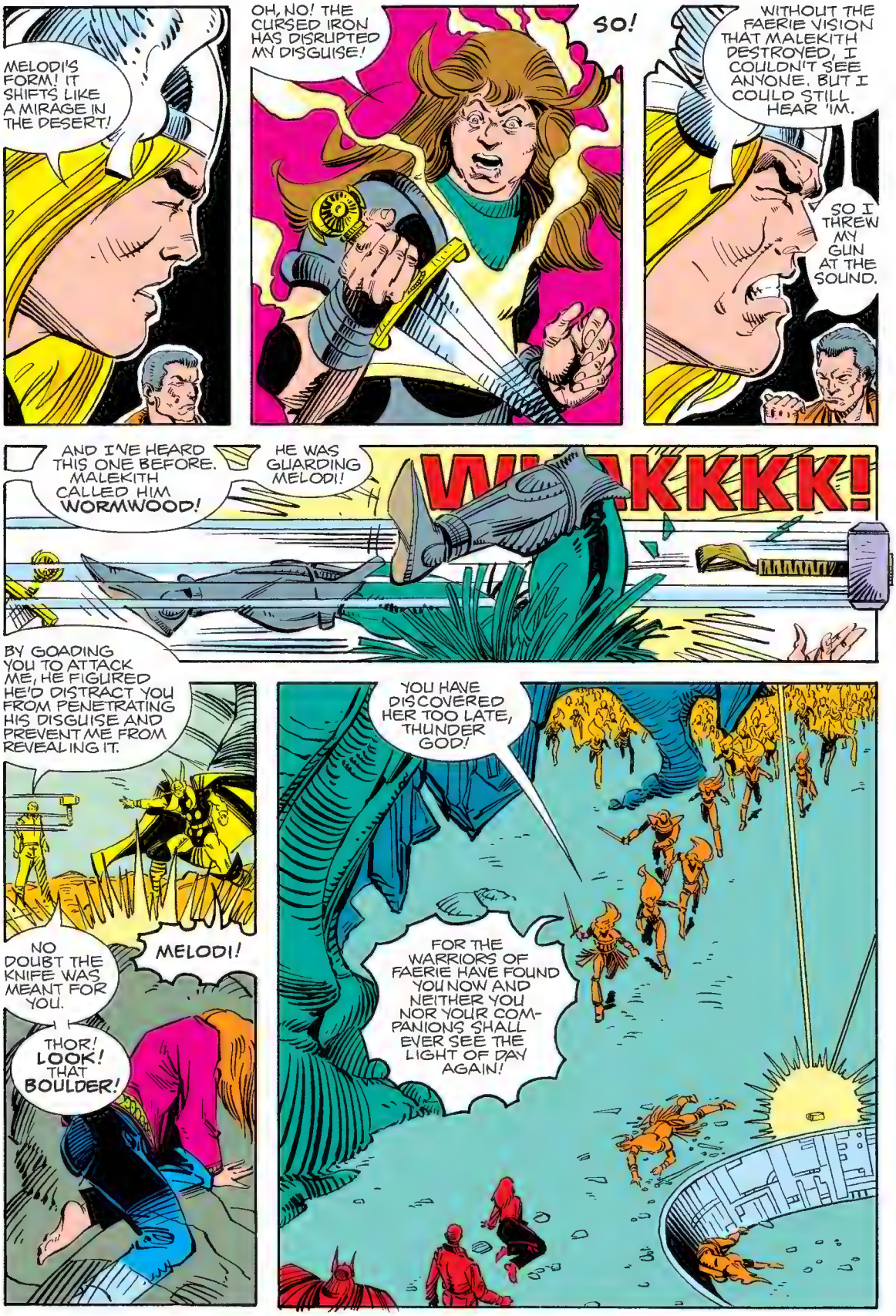

AND I HAVE BROUGHT HIM!
FRAKATH!


UNCONSCIOUS! AS YOU SHALL SOON BE!
THOUGH YOU DESERVE WORSE!
BWHRAAM!

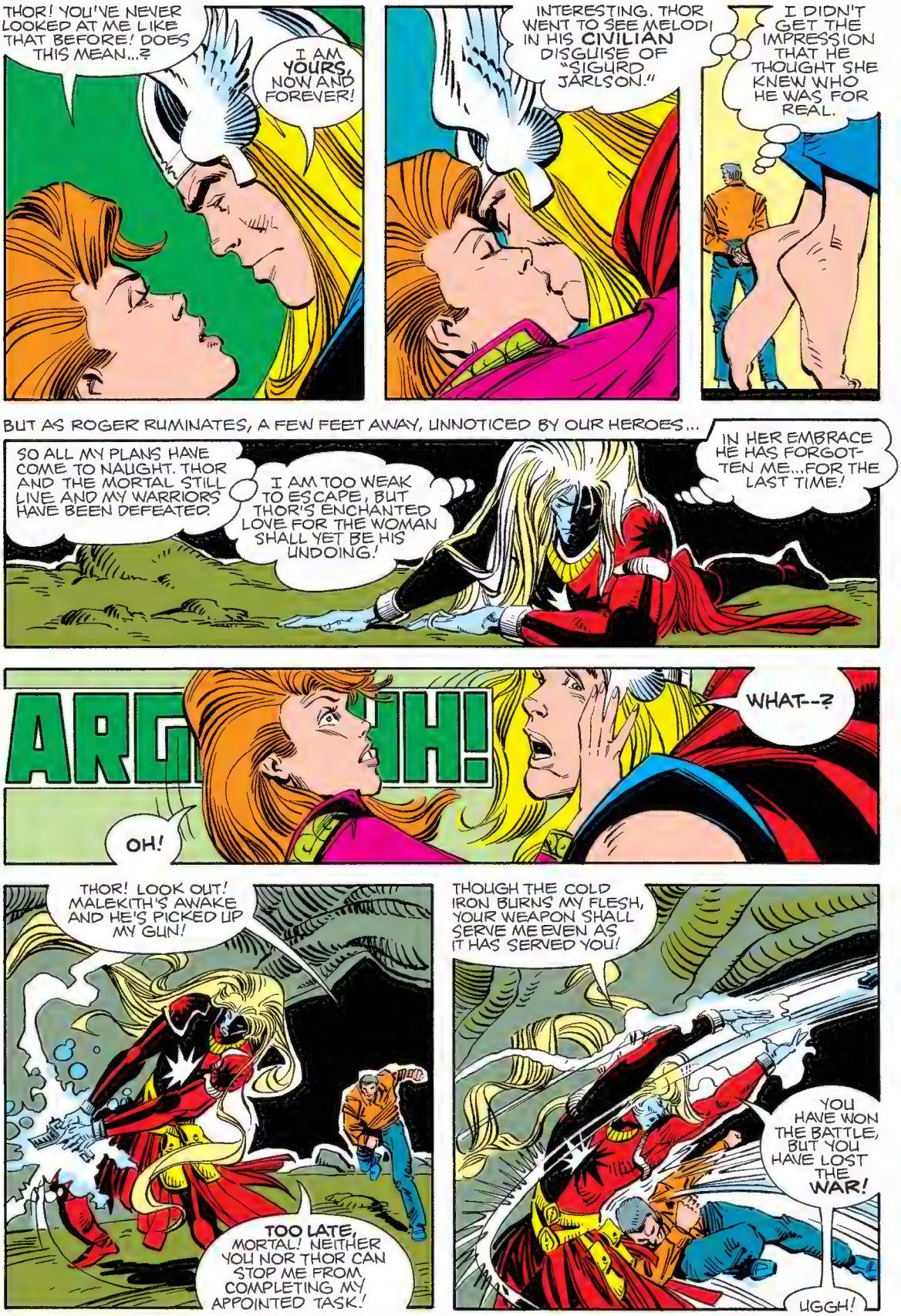

THOR! IS IT REALLY YOU?
MELODI!


MELODI, MY OWN TRUE LOVE! HAVE THEY HARMED YOU? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?


WAIT! SOMETHING IS AMISS!
THERE, MY BELOVED! IT IS ROGER!
WHAT? MY FRIEND?
HE IS YOUR FRIEND NO LONGER! THE FAERIES HAVE FED HIM THEIR ENCHANTED FOOD AND HE IS ONE OF THEM NOW!
LOOK!
WATCH OUT, THOR! IT'S ANOTHER TRAP!
MY LOVE, PROTECT ME!
STAND BACK, ROGER! NO ONE SHALL HARM MY LADY WHILE THE GOD OF THUNDER LIVES!
MAYBE NOT, THOR, BUT ARE YOU SURE THAT'S YOUR LADY?
EH?
GAHHGH!
FSSSSSSSTT!

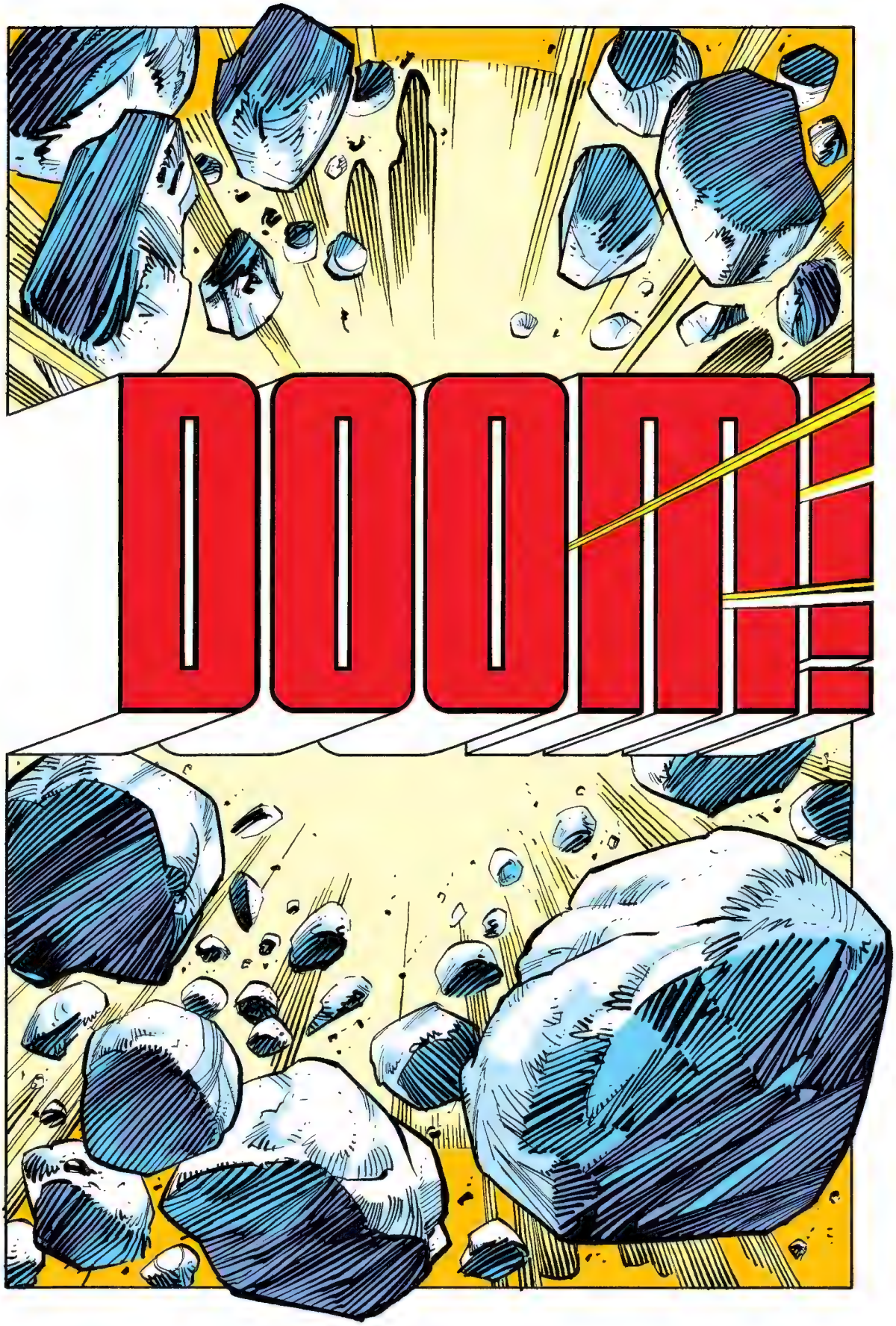

MELODI'S FORM! IT SHIFTS LIKE A MIRAGE IN THE DESERT!
OH, NO! THE CURSED IRON HAS DISRUPTED MY DISGUISE!
SO!
WITHOUT THE FAERIE VISION THAT MALEKITH DESTROYED, I COULDN'T SEE ANYONE. BUT I COULD STILL HEAR 'IM.
SO I THREW MY GUN AT THE SOUND.
AND I'VE HEARD THIS ONE BEFORE. MALEKITH CALLED HIM WORMWOOD!
HE WAS GUARDING MELODI!
KKKK!
BY GOADING YOU TO ATTACK ME, HE FIGURED HE'D DISTRACT YOU FROM PENETRATING HIS DISGUISE AND PREVENT ME FROM REVEALING IT.
NO DOUBT THE KNIFE WAS MEANT FOR YOU.
MELODI!
THOR! LOOK! THAT BOULDER!
YOU HAVE DISCOVERED HER TOO LATE, THUNDER GOD!
FOR THE WARRIORS OF FAERIE HAVE FOUND YOU NOW AND NEITHER YOU NOR YOUR COMPANIONS SHALL EVER SEE THE LIGHT OF DAY AGAIN!

PERHAPS, BUT LET US FACE THE SUN TOGETHER AND SEE WHO IS THE STRONGER!
KRATHOOM!
ABOVE! THE BLUE SKY!
HIS HAMMER HAS DESTROYED THE ROOF OF FAERIE!
BACK! BACK! 'TIS THE DAWNING HOUR!
WE CANNOT STAND THE LIGHT!
FLEE, BROTHERS, FLEE!
INTO THE CAVES OF NIGHT!
OHHH.
THOR, WHAT'S HAPPENED? I FEEL AS THOUGH I'VE JUST AWAKENED FROM A DEEP SLEEP!
INDEED YOU HAVE, MY LOVE. A LONG NIGHTMARE THAT HAS ENDED.


THOR! YOU'VE NEVER LOOKED AT ME LIKE THAT BEFORE! DOES THIS MEAN...?
I AM YOURS, NOW AND FOREVER!
INTERESTING. THOR WENT TO SEE MELODI IN HIS CIVILIAN DISGUISE OF "SIGURD JARLSON."
I DIDN'T GET THE IMPRESSION THAT HE THOUGHT SHE KNEW WHO HE WAS FOR REAL.
BUT AS ROGER RUMINATES, A FEW FEET AWAY, UNNOTICED BY OUR HEROES...
SO ALL MY PLANS HAVE COME TO NAUGHT. THOR AND THE MORTAL STILL LIVE AND MY WARRIORS HAVE BEEN DEFEATED.
I AM TOO WEAK TO ESCAPE, BUT THOR'S ENCHANTED LOVE FOR THE WOMAN SHALL YET BE HIS UNDOING!
IN HER EMBRACE HE HAS FORGOTTEN ME...FOR THE LAST TIME!
ARG UH!
OH!
WHAT--?
THOR! LOOK OUT! MALEKITH'S AWAKE AND HE'S PICKED UP MY GUN!
TOO LATE, MORTAL! NEITHER YOU NOR THOR CAN STOP ME FROM COMPLETING MY APPOINTED TASK!
THOUGH THE COLD IRON BURNS MY FLESH, YOUR WEAPON SHALL SERVE ME EVEN AS IT HAS SERVED YOU!
YOU HAVE WON THE BATTLE, BUT YOU HAVE LOST THE WAR!
UGGH!

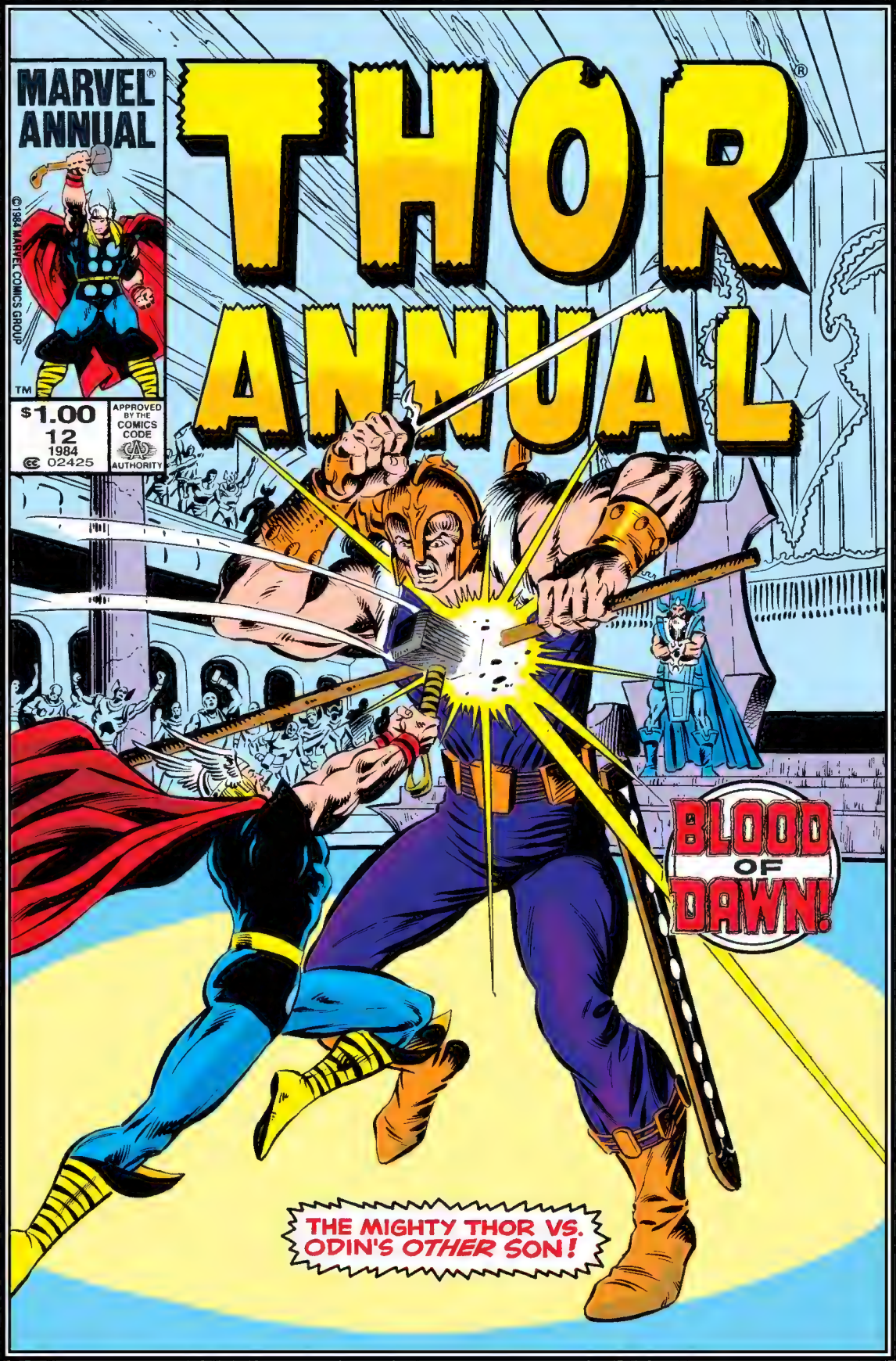
SHATTER!
FOUL BLACK-GUARD! MY FATHER WILL DEAL WITH YOU WHEN THE TIME COMES!
MAYBE SO, THOR, BUT I THINK OUR TIME JUST RAN OUT!
LOOK BEHIND US!
AND IN THE REALM OF FAERIE, THE VERY AIR SEEMS TO CRYSTALLIZE...
...AS IN DEATHLY SILENCE, AN UNBEARABLY WHITE GLOBE LEAPS SKYWARD THROUGH THE SHATTERED ROOF AND INTO THE WORLD ABOVE!

ELSEWHERE, BEYOND THE FIELDS WE KNOW, A GREAT FIGURE AND A MIGHTY HOST STAND BEFORE A BLOCKED PORTAL WAITING... WAITING... UNTIL...
crck
ck
crck
SONS OF MUSPELL! OUR SERVANT HAS COMPLETED HIS TASK!
THE PORTAL IS FROZEN! WINTER HAS COME AT LAST TO THE REALM OF MORTALS!
NOW SHALL THE SWORD, TWILIGHT, SPEAK THAT ALL WHO LIVE MAY HEAR ITS VOICE AND TREMBLE!
LET THIS BE THE THIRD BLOW AGAINST THE POWER OF ASGARD!


DOOM!!

Next:

In The Beginning...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BLOOD OF DAWN!
THE MIGHTY THOR VS. ODIN'S OTHER SON!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: A TALE OF ASGARD
THE BLOOD OF DAWN!
A HILLSIDE IN THE ASGARD MOUNTAINS, SEPARATING THE GREEN MEADOWS OF THE GODS FROM THE WASTELAND OF THEIR SWORN BLOOD-FOES, THE STORM GIANTS OF JOTUNHEIM ...
CURSE THESE PINE TREES SCRATCHING MY THIGHS!
BAH! WE'RE STILL LOST!
WHAT FOOL SUGGESTED WE TAKE THIS PATH AT MIDNIGHT, ANYHOW?
WHAT FOOL!? IT WAS YOU, HORVALD, BLAST YOUR EYES!
THAT'S A LIE, GROLF! TELL HIM, ASLAK, ISN'T IT? I DON'T REMEMBER--
HOW WOULD YOU REMEMBER?!
DRUNK AS YOU ARE WITH ENOUGH MEAD IN YOUR BELLY TO DROWN THE WORLD SERPENT!
ARGH, MY OWN HEAD'S POUNDING FOR LACK OF SLEEP!

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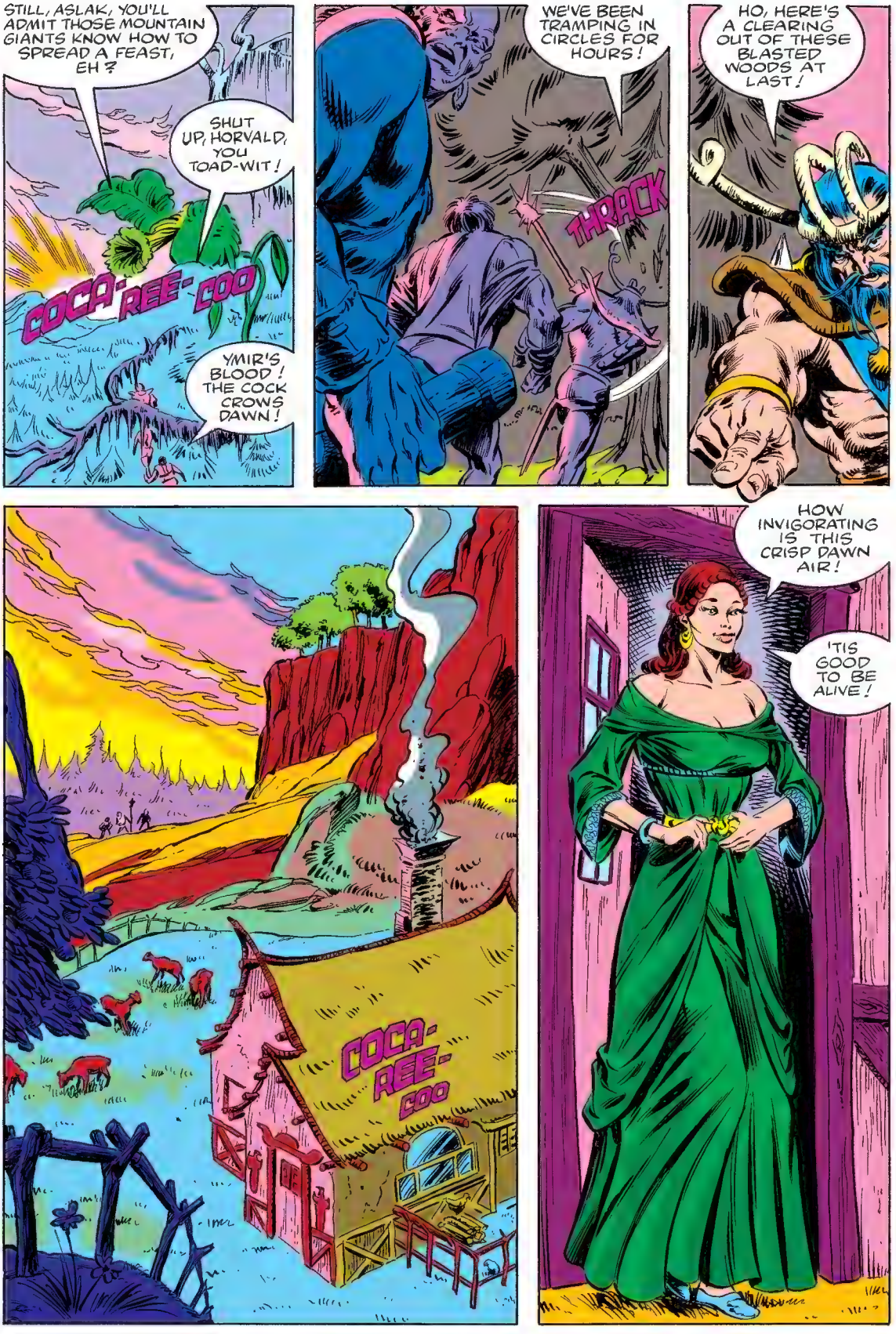
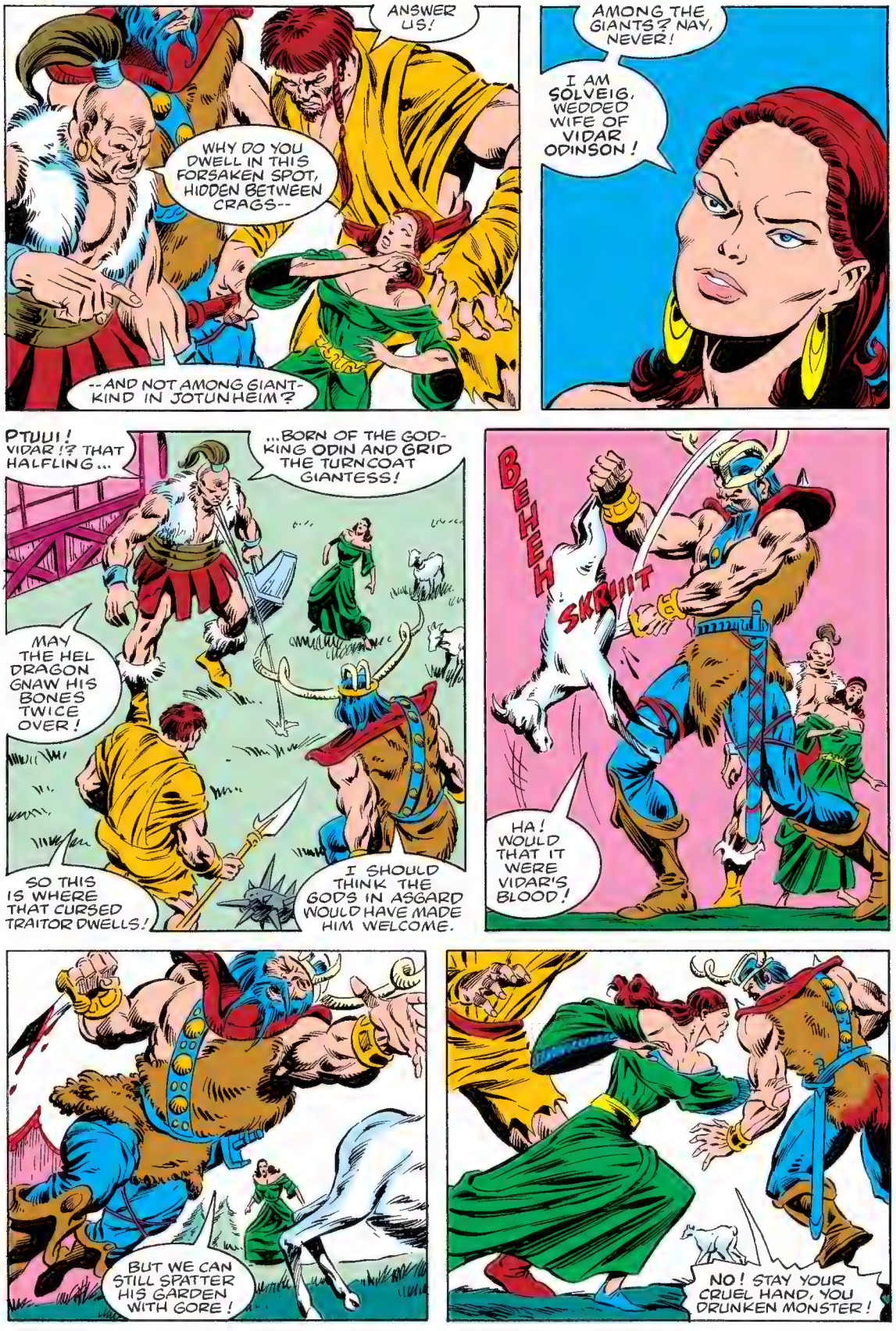
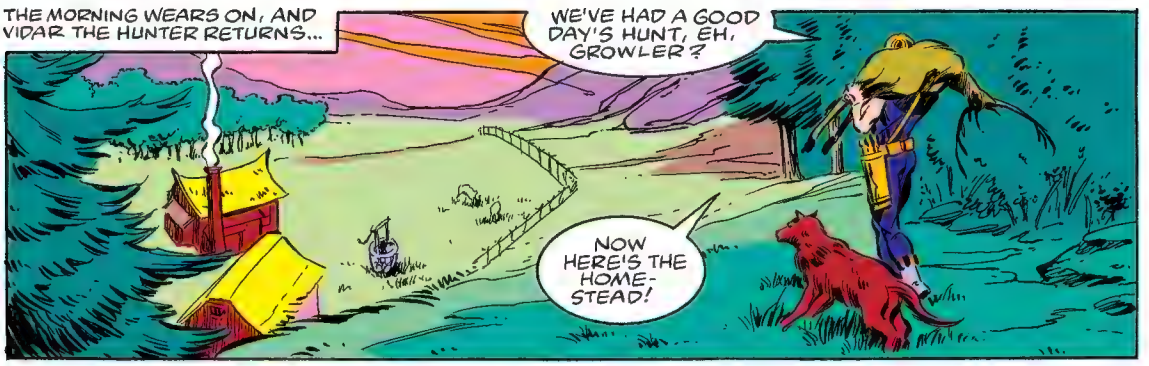

STILL, ASLAK, YOU'LL ADMIT THOSE MOUNTAIN GIANTS KNOW HOW TO SPREAD A FEAST, EH?
SHUT UP, HORVALD, YOU TOAD-WIT!
COCA-REE-COO
YMIR'S BLOOD! THE COCK CROWS DAWN!
WE'VE BEEN TRAMPING IN CIRCLES FOR HOURS!
THRACK
HO, HERE'S A CLEARING OUT OF THESE BLASTED WOODS AT LAST!
COCA-REE-COO
HOW INVIGORATING IS THIS CRISP DAWN AIR!
'TIS GOOD TO BE ALIVE!

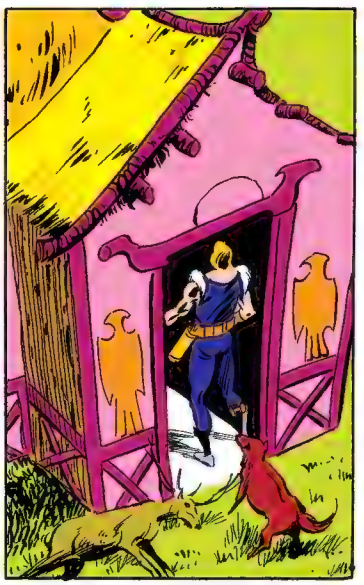
AND A GOOD DAY TO YOU, REDCOMB. WHAT SAY YOU TO MY BEAUTIFUL NEW BELT?
COOCAROO
DEAR VIDAR CRAFTED IT AS A LOVE TOKEN--GOLDEN BUCKLE AND ALL--WITH HIS OWN HANDS.
MY HEART'S NEAR BURSTING WITH GOOD SPIRIT THIS MORN. I KNOW--
--I'LL MILK THE GOATS TILL VIDAR RETURNS FROM HIS EARLY HUNT.
THERE IS A SECRET PLACE IN THE WOODS I KNOW ITS GARDEN BRIGHT WITH POSIES AND ITS HEARTH AGLOW
WHERE LOVERS MEET, AND, FAR FROM WATCHFUL EYES...
KISS FROM DAWN TO DU--
WHO--!?
IF...IF YOU SEEK FOOD, STRANGERS... I'VE WILD MUSHROOMS AND VENISON WITHIN--
BY THE SLAVERING JAWS OF THE SUN-WOLF, WHO ARE YOU, WOMAN?
A GIANTESS, THAT I CAN SEE, THOUGH YOUR PUNY SIZE TO OURS IS LIKE A WALRUS TO A WHALE!


ANSWER US!
WHY DO YOU DWELL IN THIS FORSAKEN SPOT, HIDDEN BETWEEN CRAGS--
--AND NOT AMONG GIANT-KIND IN JOTUNHEIM?
AMONG THE GIANTS? NAY, NEVER!
I AM SOLVEIG, WEDDED WIFE OF VIDAR ODINSON!
PTUUI! VIDAR!? THAT HALFLING...
...BORN OF THE GOD-KING ODIN AND GRID THE TURNCOAT GIANTESS!
MAY THE HEL DRAGON GNAW HIS BONES TWICE OVER!
SO THIS IS WHERE THAT CURSED TRAITOR DWELLS!
I SHOULD THINK THE GODS IN ASGARD WOULD HAVE MADE HIM WELCOME.
BEHEH
SKRUIT
HA! WOULD THAT IT WERE VIDAR'S BLOOD!
BUT WE CAN STILL SPATTER HIS GARDEN WITH GORE!
NO! STAY YOUR CRUEL HAND, YOU DRUNKEN MONSTER!

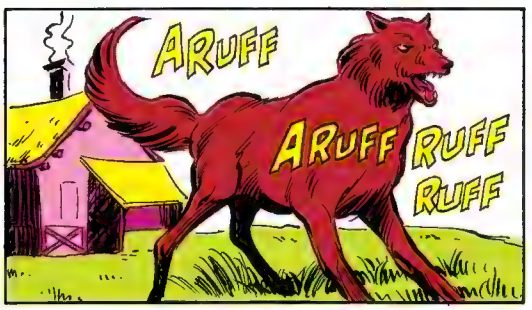
I'LL PIERCE YOUR HEART WITH TROLL-IRON, YOU MEDDLESOME WITCH!
STINK
HAR! THIS WILL SHOW VIDAR WHAT HATRED WE HOLD FOR HIM IN JOTUNHEIM.
LET'S BE OFF.
WAIT. HERE'S A BAUBLE I'LL TRADE FOR DRINK.
MOVE YOUR RUMP, HORVALD! MY HEAD HAMMERS LIKE A DWARF'S ANVIL--
--AND MY BOOTS ARE FILLED WITH GRAVEL!
HO! AND HERE DAWN LIGHTS OUR WAY HOME.


THE MORNING WEARS ON, AND VIDAR THE HUNTER RETURNS...
WE'VE HAD A GOOD DAY'S HUNT, EH, GROWLER?
NOW HERE'S THE HOME-STEAD!

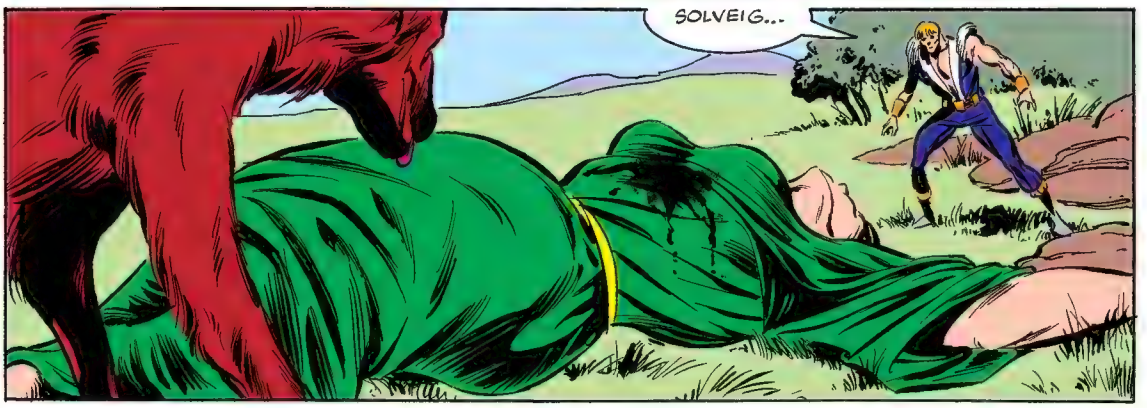
SOLVEIG!
WHERE IS YOUR SWEET VOICE TO GREET ME LIKE A SOFT BREEZE AMONG THE PINES, MY LADY LOVE?



SOLVEIG?


ARUFF
ARUFF
RUFF
RUFF

GROWLER, WHAT--!?


SOLVEIG...

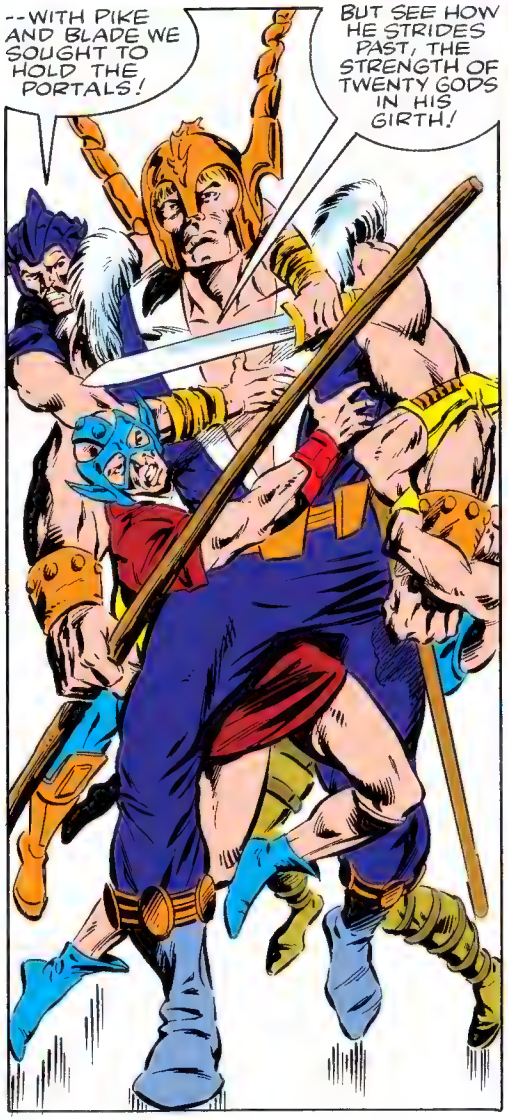
WHAT--? THIS JEWEL--
--THE BELT IS GONE?
SOLVEIG, SOLVEIG...
...WHO WOULD HAVE DONE SUCH A THING?
THOUGH ASGARD HAS NEVER WELCOMED US, STILL THIS PYRE WILL HONOR THEE, MY FALLEN LOVE, IN THE TRADITION OF THE GODS.

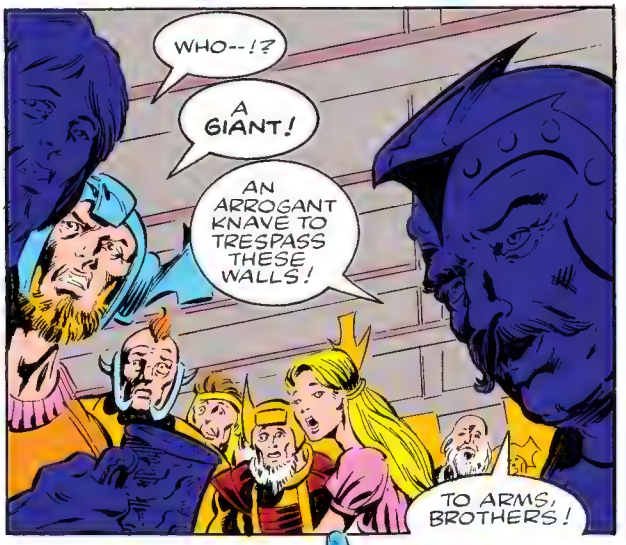
SOON AFTER, IN THE CAPITAL CITY OF THE GODS ...
RAISE HIGH YOUR TANKARDS AND DRINKING HORNS, FELLOWS!
A TOAST TO OUR KING AND ASGARD'S GOLDEN HALLS!
HO! MIGHTY THOR YET RAISES HIS TOAST HIGHEST OF ALL!
AYE, WARRIORS. 'TIS A PROUD SON'S DUE HOMAGE--
--TO ALL-FATHER ODIN, MY OWN BLOOD-SIRE!

NOW, HEROES, RING OUT THY NOBLE SENTIMENT--
--FOR ODIN AND FOR ASGARD!
HOLD! HUGINN AND MUNINN--
--THOUGHT AND MEMORY!
MY FATHER'S BIRDS OF WISDOM AND PORTENT.
DARK-FEATHERED HERALDS, ODIN BIDS THEE SPEAK.

WHAT SAY YOU?
HERE IN ASGARD--!?

A THOUSAND PARDONS, LORD ODIN--!

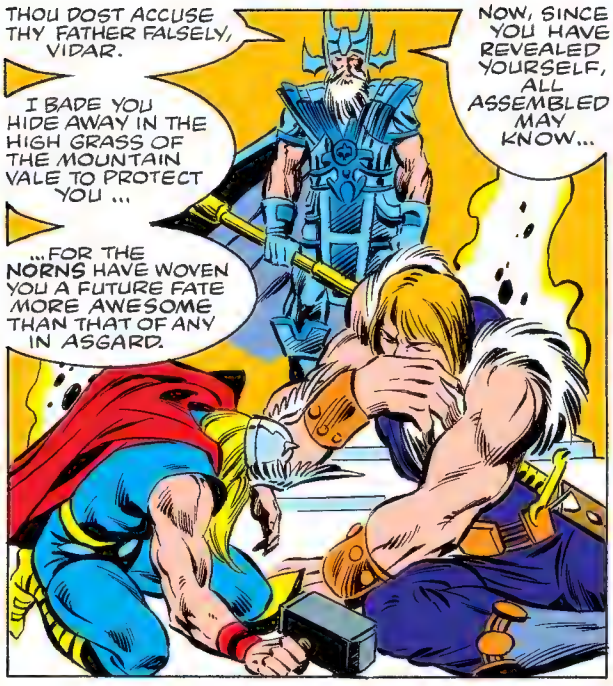

--WITH PIKE AND BLADE WE SOUGHT TO HOLD THE PORTALS!
BUT SEE HOW HE STRIDES PAST, THE STRENGTH OF TWENTY GODS IN HIS GIRTH!


WHO--!?
A GIANT!
AN ARROGANT KNAVE TO TRESPASS THESE WALLS!
TO ARMS, BROTHERS!

STAY THY WEAPONS! 'TIS MY COMMAND!

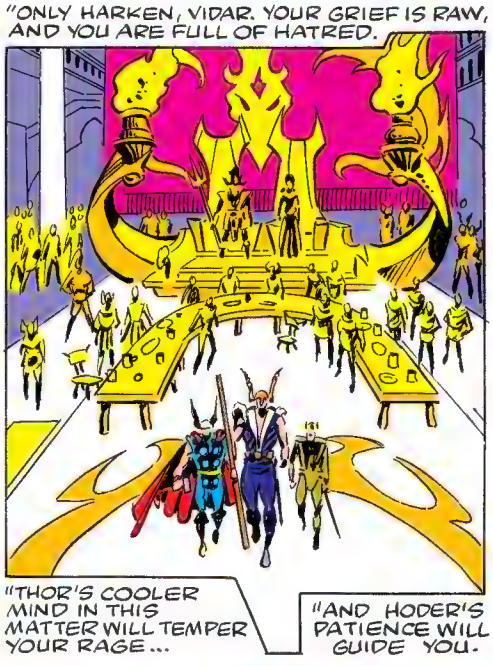
YOU HAVE YOUR LEAVE TO SPEAK, VIDAR, SON OF ODIN.
SO, FATHER, THIS IS ASGARD FROM WHOSE SHIELD-WALLS OF BURNISHED GOLD I AM BANISHED BY YOUR WILL.
SILENTLY I ACCEPTED MY OUTCAST LOT WHILE MY BELOVED SOLVEIG FILLED MY HOURS WITH SWEET CONTENTMENT.
BUT NOW MY WIFE IS SLAIN.
DID YOU NOT SEE THE CRUEL DEED WHEN YOU GAZED UPON THE NINE WORLDS FROM YOUR HIGH MOUNTAIN SEAT THIS VERY DAWN?
NAY, I FEAR NOT. FOR VIDAR'S FATE MEANS LESS TO YOU THAN THAT OF YOUR FOSTER-SON, MAD LOKI...
...WHOM YOU PERMIT TO DWELL WITHIN YOUR REALM BECAUSE HE WEARS A HUMBLE GODLY FORM UNLIKE MYSELF--THOUGH HE, LIKE I, BOASTS FOREBEARS AMONG THE GIANTS.
YET BITTER THOUGH I AM, I ASK YOU A BOON--!
FIRST YOU DARE TAUNT THE KING OF GODS AND THEN YOU CRAVE HIS BOON? NAY! YOU SHALL PAY DEARLY FOR THIS LACK OF REVERENCE TO THY SIRE!
BEND THY KNEE TO THE POWER OF THE GODS!
THRUNK
MY HAMMER RAINS BLOWS LIKE THE VERY THUNDERSTORM YET YOU PARRY THEM WITH A MERE STAFF--?!

A STAFF ENCHANTED AND UNBREAKABLE...
"...AND STOUT ENOUGH TO SHAKE ASGARD TO THE RAFTERS!"
ENOUGH! I SAY THEE NAY!
BRAAK


THOU DOST ACCUSE THY FATHER FALSELY, VIDAR.
I BADE YOU HIDE AWAY IN THE HIGH GRASS OF THE MOUNTAIN VALE TO PROTECT YOU ...
...FOR THE NORNS HAVE WOVEN YOU A FUTURE FATE MORE AWESOME THAN THAT OF ANY IN ASGARD.
NOW, SINCE YOU HAVE REVEALED YOURSELF, ALL ASSEMBLED MAY KNOW...

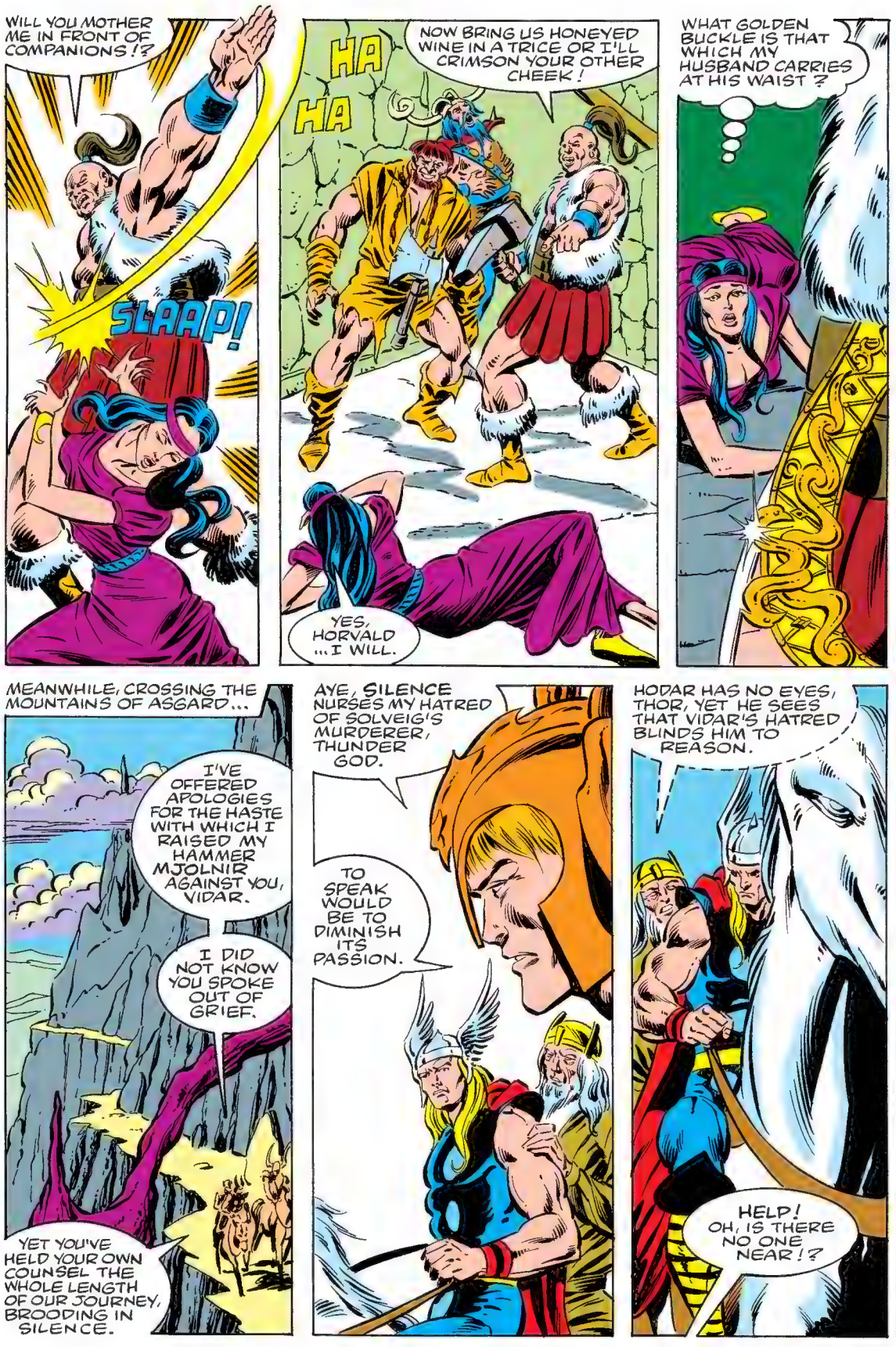
...THAT ON A DAY FAR DISTANT, YOUR SWORD-ARM ALONE SHALL BE ODIN'S MIGHT AND ASGARD'S REDEMPTION.
YET BEFORE YOU REPAIR TO YOUR VALLEY HOME, WE'LL GRANT YOU WHAT WE SENSE IS IN YOUR HEART.

BLIND HODER SEES WITH AN INNER EYE OF AGE AND WISDOM. HE SHALL LEAD YOU TO THOSE WHOSE HANDS ARE RED WITH SOLVEIG'S BLOOD.
AND THOR SHALL LEND THEE STRENGTH OF ARM.

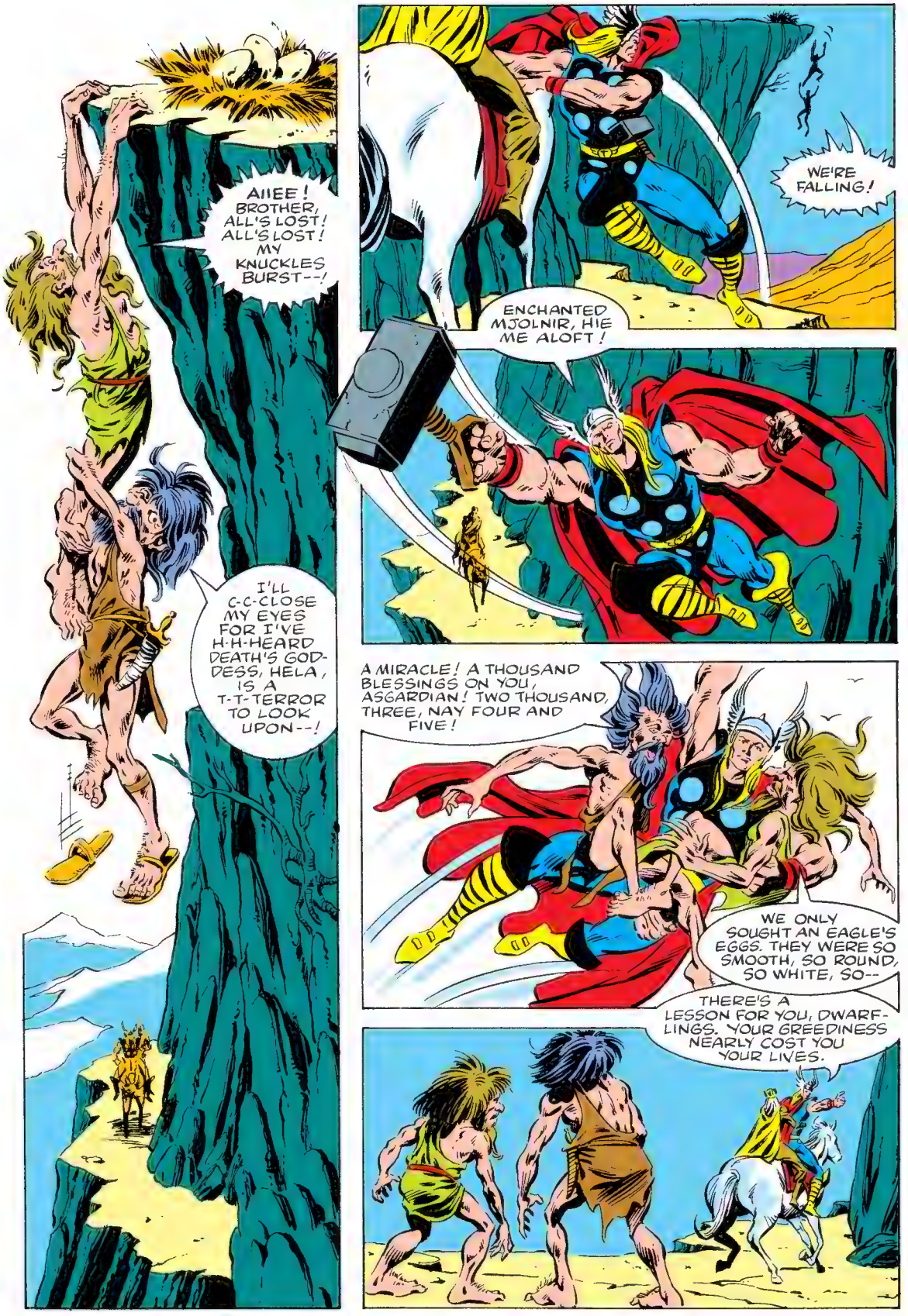

"ONLY HARKEN, VIDAR. YOUR GRIEF IS RAW, AND YOU ARE FULL OF HATRED.
"THOR'S COOLER MIND IN THIS MATTER WILL TEMPER YOUR RAGE...
"AND HODER'S PATIENCE WILL GUIDE YOU.

"ABOVE ALL, RULE THY PASSION, OR IT WILL RULE THEE AND POISON THY WILL.
"NOW IF YOU HEED OUR WORDS, GO WITH OUR PROTECTION."

MEANWHILE, IN JOTUNHEIM ...
ARGH, MY HEAD IS --
YMIR'S GUTS! CLOSE YOUR TROUGH ALREADY, ASLAK! YOU'VE GROUCHED AND GRUMBLED THE WHOLE WAY HOME!
NOW THAT WE'VE REACHED HORVALD'S CASTLE, WE CAN STRETCH OUR BONES.
AFTER A TANKARD OF HOT MEAD, EH, GROLF?
HORVALD, HUSBAND, OH, THANK THE STARS YOU'VE RETURNED.
BAH, WOMAN!
I TOSSED AND TURNED THE WHOLE NIGHT FOR FEAR SOME HURT OR HARM HAD COME TO YOU.


WILL YOU MOTHER ME IN FRONT OF COMPANIONS!?
SLAAP!
HA HA
NOW BRING US HONEYED WINE IN A TRICE OR I'LL CRIMSON YOUR OTHER CHEEK!
YES, HORVALD ...I WILL.
WHAT GOLDEN BUCKLE IS THAT WHICH MY HUSBAND CARRIES AT HIS WAIST?
MEANWHILE, CROSSING THE MOUNTAINS OF ASGARD...
I'VE OFFERED APOLOGIES FOR THE HASTE WITH WHICH I RAISED MY HAMMER MJOLNIR AGAINST YOU, VIDAR.
I DID NOT KNOW YOU SPOKE OUT OF GRIEF.
YET YOU'VE HELD YOUR OWN COUNSEL THE WHOLE LENGTH OF OUR JOURNEY, BROODING IN SILENCE.
AYE, SILENCE NURSES MY HATRED OF SOLVEIG'S MURDERER, THUNDER GOD.
TO SPEAK WOULD BE TO DIMINISH ITS PASSION.
HODAR HAS NO EYES, THOR, YET HE SEES THAT VIDAR'S HATRED BLINDS HIM TO REASON.
HELP! OH, IS THERE NO ONE NEAR!?

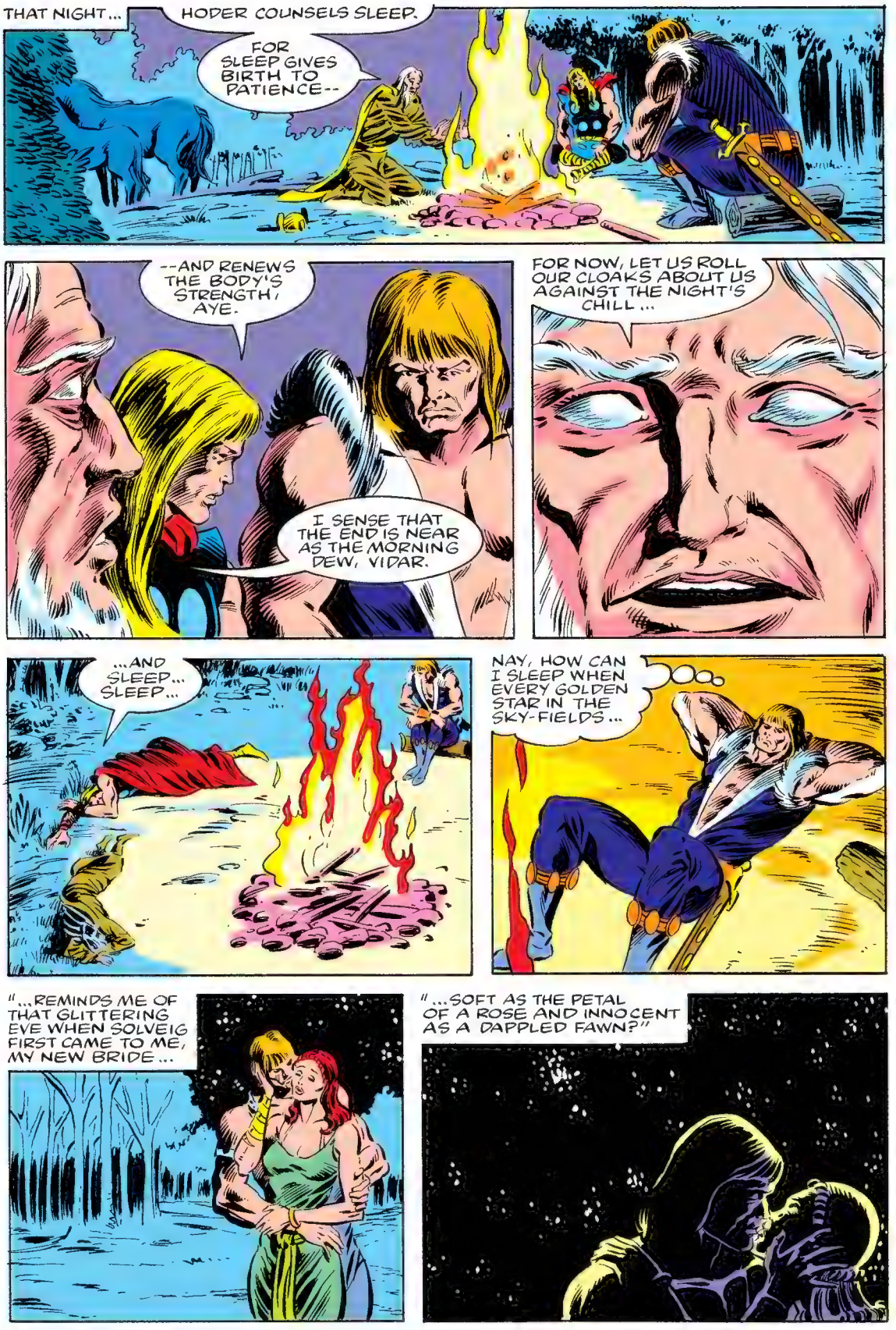
HOLD! THERE'S A DESPERATE CRY--
HOLD? FOR SOME STRANGE VOICE IN THE MOUNTAINS--
--NAY, THOR, SOLVEIG'S VENGEANCE CRIES OUT MORE DESPERATELY.
A VISION! A VISION!
ONE LIFE LOST AND ONE LIFE MORE!
VIDAR, HEAR REASON--A LIFE MUST BE SAVED!
NAY, THOR. A DEATH MUST BE AVENGED.
HODER HAS ALREADY SPOKEN -- THE WAY OF GUILT WENDS TO JOTUNHEIM.
AND NOT AN ARMY OF IRON-CLAWED OGRES COULD PRY ME FROM THAT PATH NOW.
HELP! BY THE FORGE OF MY FATHER-- OH! 'TIS HOPELESS--ALL'S LOST!
I WOULD NOT FORSAKE VIDAR, MY FATHER'S SON, BUT I'LL NOT LET A LIFE BE LOST!
COME, HODER, WE MUST ANSWER THIS PLEA!


AIIEE! BROTHER, ALL'S LOST! ALL'S LOST! MY KNUCKLES BURST--!
I'LL C-C-CLOSE MY EYES FOR I'VE H-H-HEARD DEATH'S GODDESS, HELA, IS A T-T-TERROR TO LOOK UPON--!
WE'RE FALLING!
ENCHANTED MJOLNIR, HIE ME ALOFT!
A MIRACLE! A THOUSAND BLESSINGS ON YOU, ASGARDIAN! TWO THOUSAND, THREE, NAY FOUR AND FIVE!
WE ONLY SOUGHT AN EAGLE'S EGGS. THEY WERE SO SMOOTH, SO ROUND, SO WHITE, SO--
THERE'S A LESSON FOR YOU, DWARFLINGS. YOUR GREEDINESS NEARLY COST YOU YOUR LIVES.

WHILE IN THE WOODS OF THE MOUNTAIN AHEAD ...
WHAT NOISE IS THAT I HEAR?
HAIL, BOLD KNIGHT! WE ARE HAKON AND OTNY, WARRIORS OF ASGARD!
WHO ARE YOU AND WHITHER DO YOU JOURNEY?
I AM VIDAR AND I RIDE TO JOTUNHEIM, TO EXACT BLOOD FROM THE SLAYER OF MY BRIDE.
WE, TOO, SEEK REDRESS OF BITTER WRONGS AMONG THE STORM GIANTS.
LET US THREE JOIN FORCES AND TOGETHER WE SHALL FEED THE HATEFUL SONS OF YMIR TO THE FLAMES OF OUR VENGEANCE.
YOUR WORDS ECHO MY OWN HEART'S PASSION, WARRIORS.
I ACCEPT YOUR BID.
THEN ONLY HELP US TO BREAK OUR CAMP IN THE FOREST'S THICK AND WE'LL BE OFF.
NOW, HAKON, CAST OFF THESE UGLY HUMAN FORMS WE WEAR!
FOOL! WE ARE WOLF GODS AND SONS OF MIGHTY FENRIS, WHO GUARD THESE HILLS AGAINST THE FOES OF JOTUNHEIM!
FOR THE STORM GIANTS ARE EVER OUR TRUE ALLIES!

VERILY, YOU DUPED ME WITH YOUR SINISTER GUILE, EVIL ONES--
--BUT YOU SHALL NOT DEFEAT ME.
BOASTER! HAI! I DRAW BLOOD!
THRAKSH
NYAARGH
HIS STAFF IS LIKE A BLUDGEON OF URU METAL! FLEE, BROTHER! HE'LL BREAK ALL OUR BONES!
PRAISE ODIN! HERE HE IS, HODER!
THEN HE HAS SAVED HIMSELF, THOR, AS I FORESAW!
FRIEND VIDAR, DID YOU FORGET THAT SAVAGE WOLF GODS PROWL THESE WOODS?
OR DID MAYHAP THE FURY IN YOUR BREAST BLIND YOU TO DECEITS A LESS IMPASSIONED MAN MIGHT SEE THROUGH?

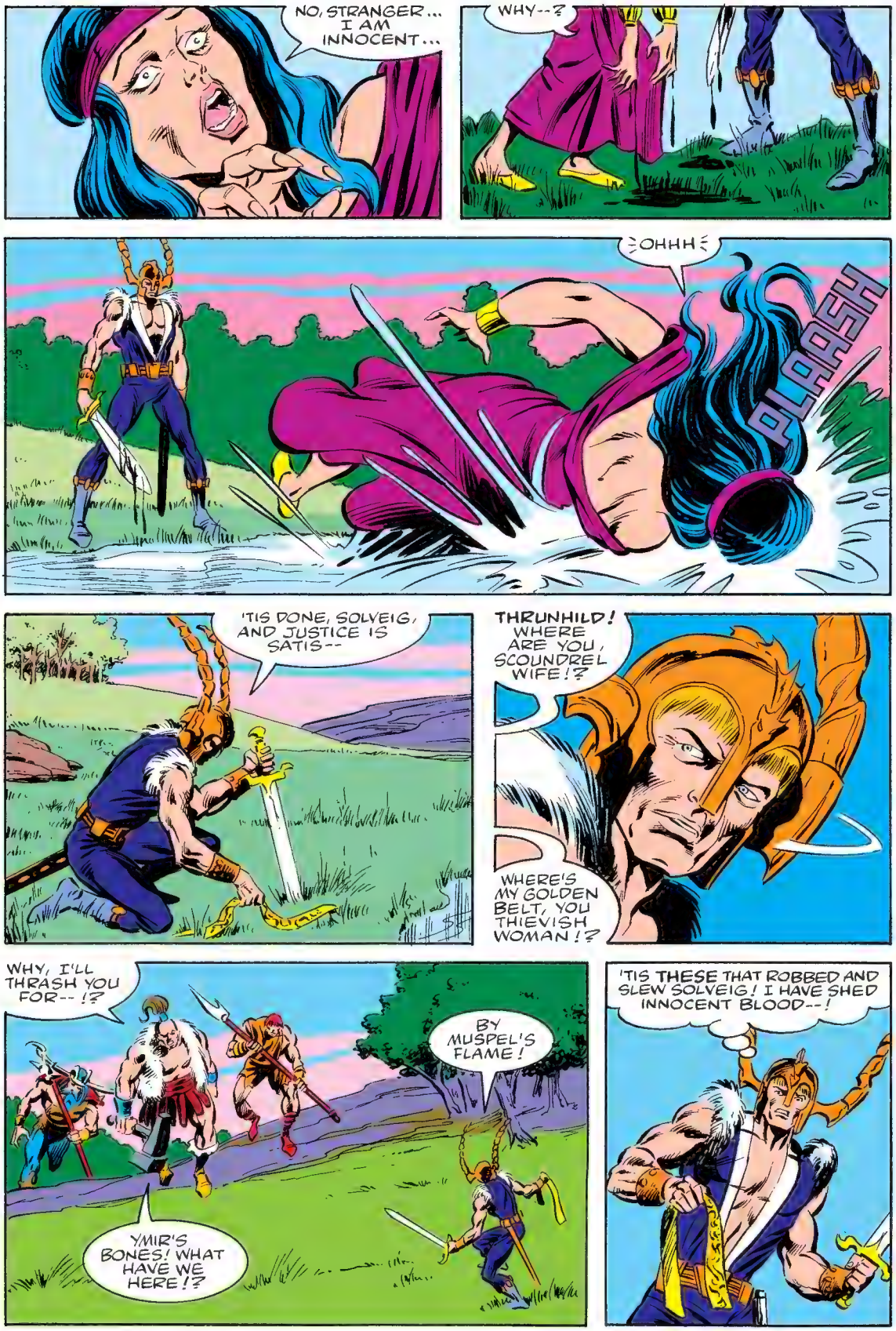
ELSEWHERE...
ZZZHHNUHUNH
BRR RZZ ZZZ
HNUNH
BRRZZZZZ
THEY'RE FAST ASLEEP.
ZZZZ
NOW WHERE--?
OH! 'TIS A BELT.
AS BEAUTIFUL AS ANY MASTER DWARF'S HANDICRAFT.
HORVALD AND HIS COMPANIONS WILL SLEEP LIKE STONES UNTIL TOMORROW NOON AT LEAST.
HE'LL NOT MISS THIS GOLDEN WAISTBAND IF I BORROW IT TILL THEN.

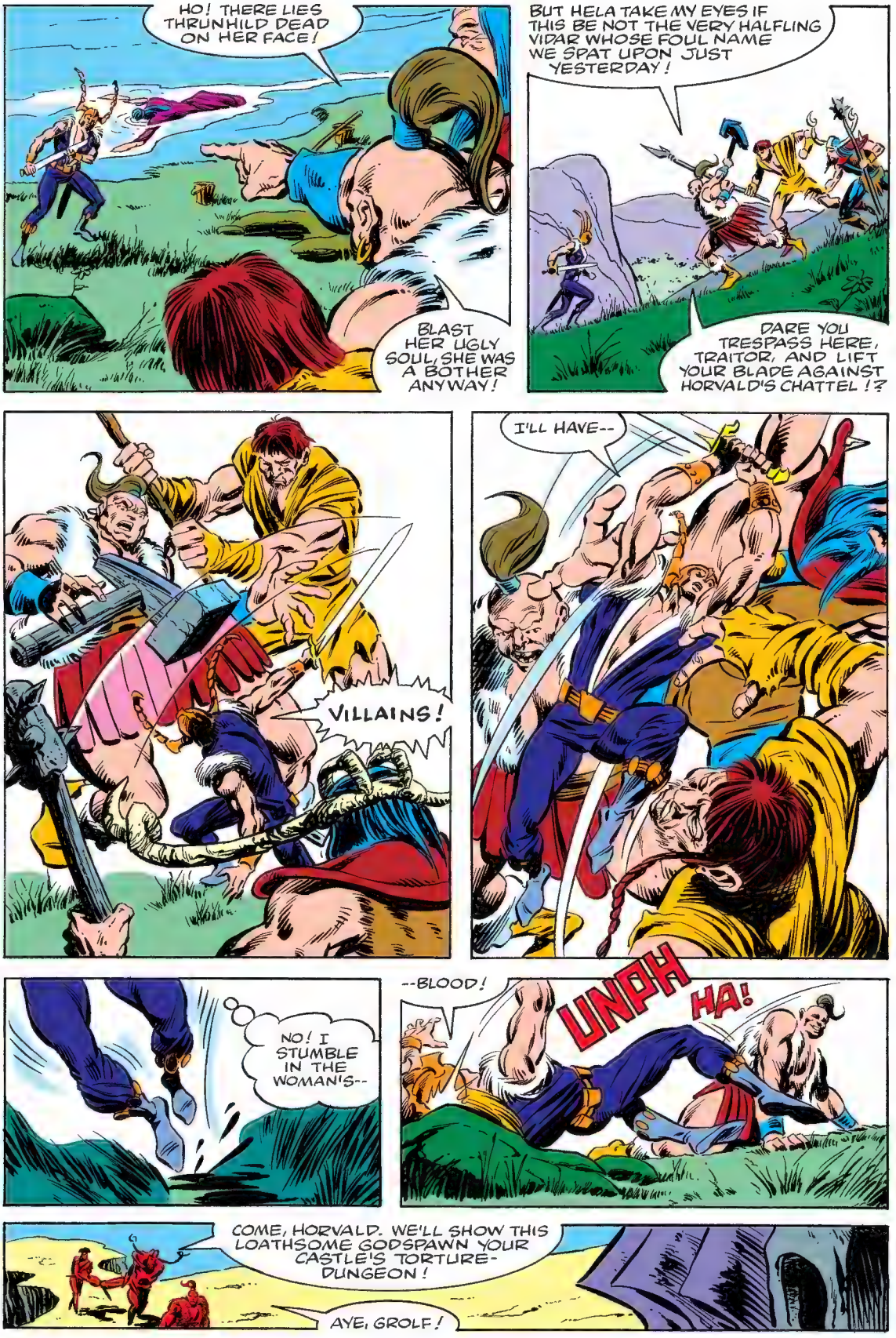

THAT NIGHT...
HODER COUNSELS SLEEP.
FOR SLEEP GIVES BIRTH TO PATIENCE--
--AND RENEWS THE BODY'S STRENGTH, AYE.
I SENSE THAT THE END IS NEAR AS THE MORNING DEW, VIDAR.
FOR NOW, LET US ROLL OUR CLOAKS ABOUT US AGAINST THE NIGHT'S CHILL...
...AND SLEEP... SLEEP...
NAY, HOW CAN I SLEEP WHEN EVERY GOLDEN STAR IN THE SKY-FIELDS...
"...REMINDS ME OF THAT GLITTERING EVE WHEN SOLVEIG FIRST CAME TO ME, MY NEW BRIDE...
"...SOFT AS THE PETAL OF A ROSE AND INNOCENT AS A DAPPLED FAWN?"

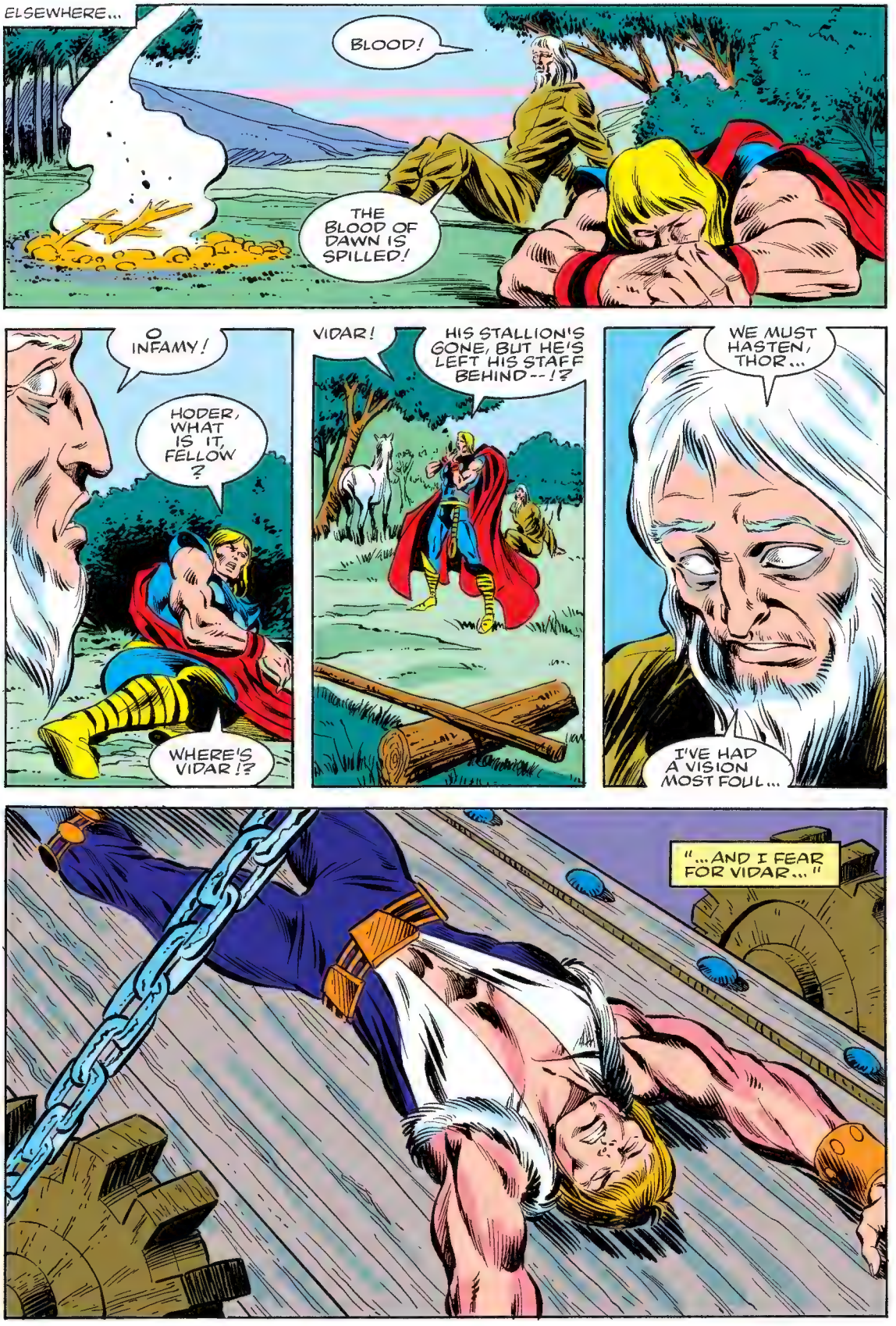
WOULD THERE BEEN SUCH EAGERNESS TO REST THE NIGHT IF I WERE A GOD DWELLING IN ASGARD?
NAY, MY PLIGHT MEANS LESS TO THEM... FOR I AM A HALFLING.
A HALFLING, AYE, AND A FOOL TO HAVE SOUGHT MY DIVINE FATHER'S AID.
SLEEP SOUNDLY, THOR AND HODER. I DO NOT NEED YOU.

DAWN IN JOTUNHEIM...
COLA-REE-LOO
THERE, HUSBAND HORVALD, TWO BUCKETS OF FRESH WATER TO BOIL PORRIDGE FOR YOUR BREAKFAST WHEN YOU RISE.
NOW JUST ONE LAST TIME I'LL ADMIRE THE BUCKLE'S GLITTERING REFLECTION AS IT DANCES ACROSS THE LAKE.
OH, THRUNHILD, YOU DO LOOK LIKE A QUEEN OF THE SKIES SPORTING THE VERY SUN AT HER WAIST!
BUT THOUGH 'TIS EARLY, STILL BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY. I MUST HIE HOME AND RETURN THE BELT BEFORE DEAR HORVALD WAKES AND--
WHO--!?

WHO ARE YOU!?
YOU WEAR SOLVEIG'S BELT.
WHAT? THIS BELT? NO--
--IT ... IT IS NOT MINE ... I ... I ...
HERE, TAKE IT, STRANGER, I MEANT NO OFFENSE, ONLY--
VILLAINESS!
HODER SPOKE TRUE. THE WAY OF GUILT DID WEND TO JOTUNHEIM.


NO, STRANGER... I AM INNOCENT...
WHY--?
OHHH
SLASH
'TIS DONE, SOLVEIG, AND JUSTICE IS SATIS--
THRUNHILD! WHERE ARE YOU, SCOUNDREL WIFE!?
WHERE'S MY GOLDEN BELT, YOU THIEVISH WOMAN!?
WHY, I'LL THRASH YOU FOR--!?
BY MUSPEL'S FLAME!
YMIR'S BONES! WHAT HAVE WE HERE!?
'TIS THESE THAT ROBBED AND SLEW SOLVEIG! I HAVE SHED INNOCENT BLOOD--!


HO! THERE LIES THRUNHILD DEAD ON HER FACE!
BLAST HER UGLY SOUL, SHE WAS A BOTHER ANYWAY!
BUT HELA TAKE MY EYES IF THIS BE NOT THE VERY HALFLING VIDAR WHOSE FOUL NAME WE SPAT UPON JUST YESTERDAY!
DARE YOU TRESPASS HERE, TRAITOR, AND LIFT YOUR BLADE AGAINST HORVALD'S CHATTEL!?
VILLAINS!
I'LL HAVE--
NO! I STUMBLE IN THE WOMAN'S--
--BLOOD!
UNPH
HA!
COME, HORVALD. WE'LL SHOW THIS LOATHSOME GODSPAWN YOUR CASTLE'S TORTURE-DUNGEON!
AYE, GROLF!

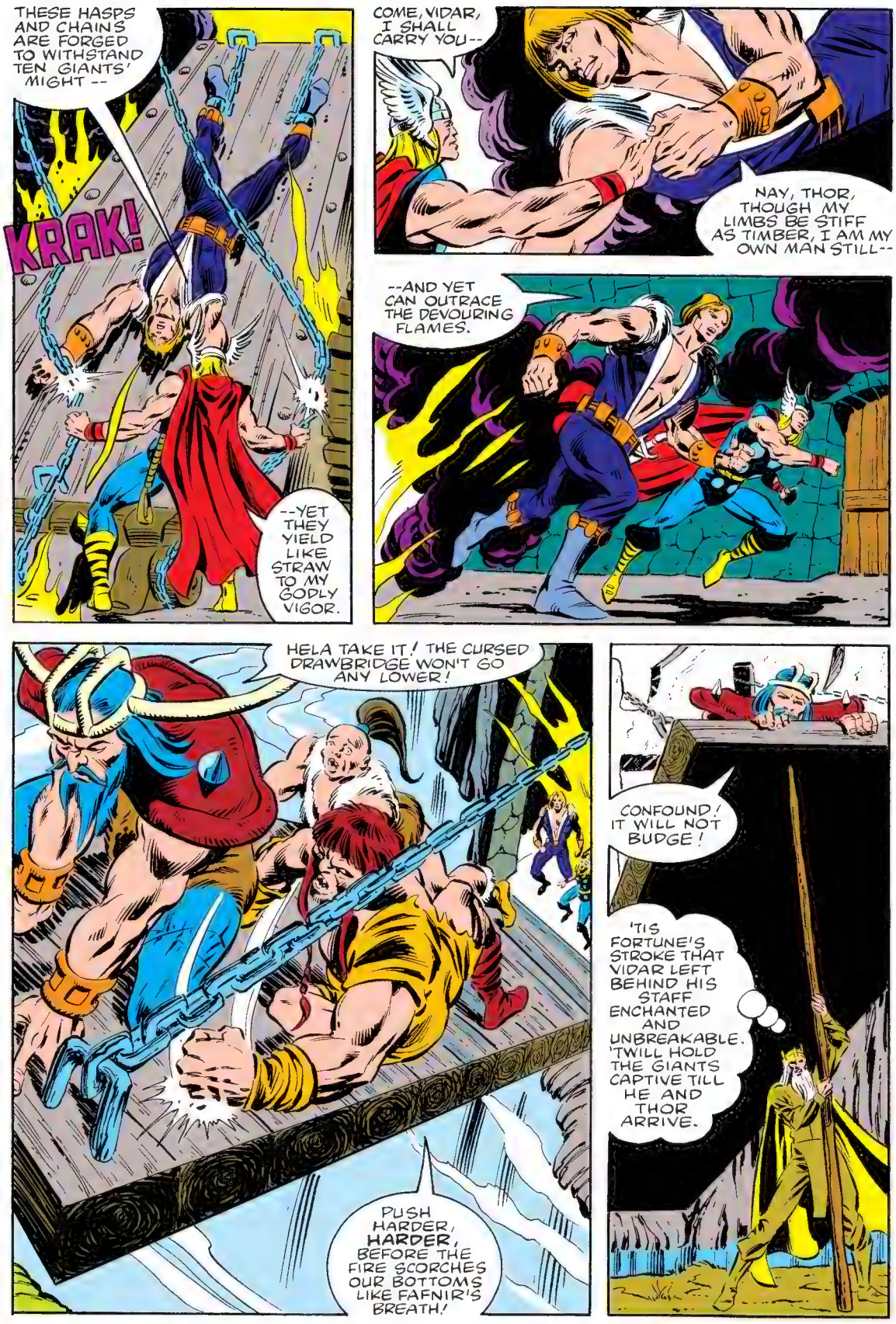

ELSEWHERE...
BLOOD!
THE BLOOD OF DAWN IS SPILLED!
O INFAMY!
HODER, WHAT IS IT, FELLOW?
WHERE'S VIDAR!?
VIDAR!
HIS STALLION'S GONE, BUT HE'S LEFT HIS STAFF BEHIND--!?
WE MUST HASTEN, THOR...
I'VE HAD A VISION MOST FOUL...
"...AND I FEAR FOR VIDAR..."

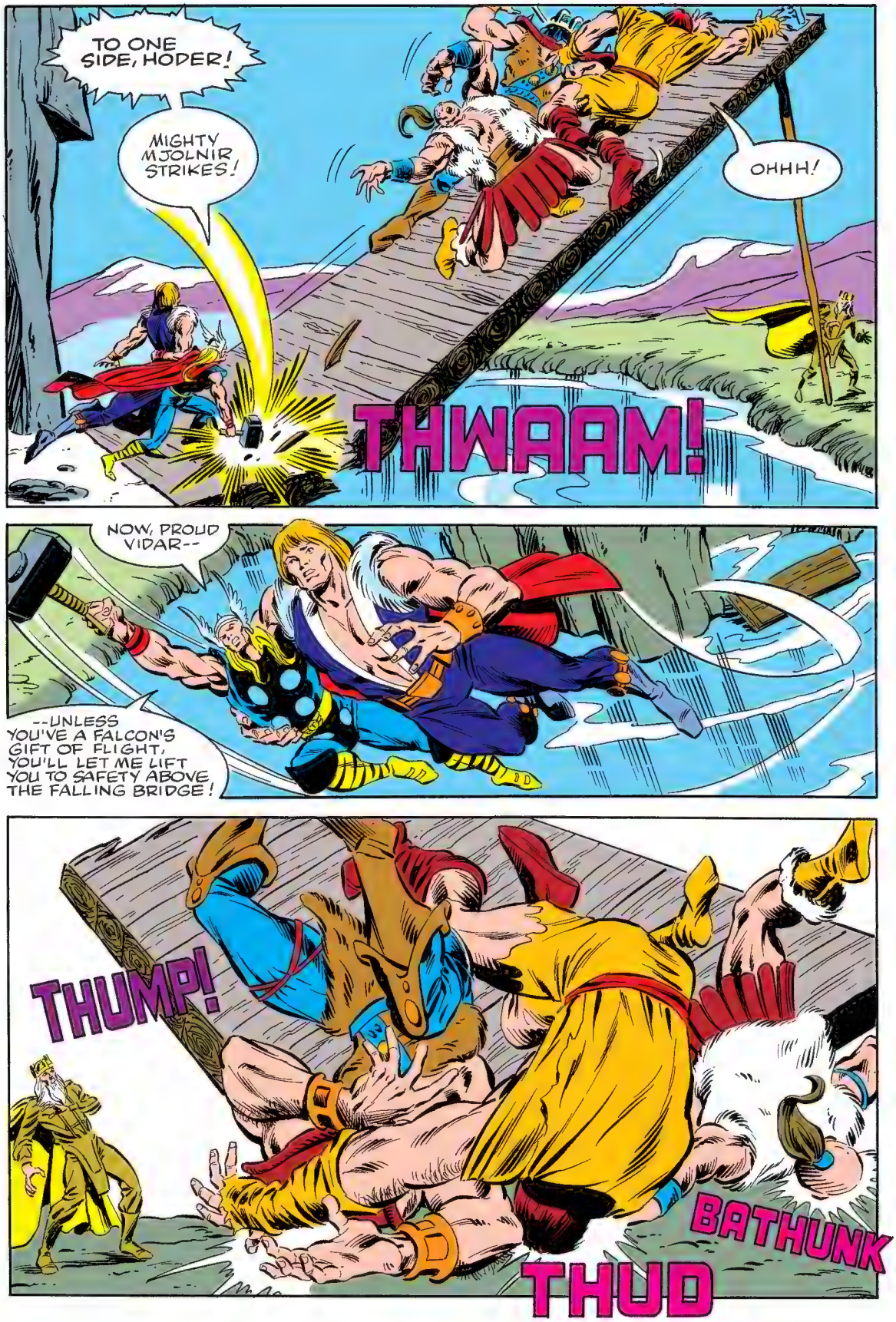
HOW IS IT, GROLF?
I'VE STRETCHED THE DOG ACROSS THIS RACK TILL HIS JOINTS ARE SWOLLEN LIKE APPLES--
--YET HE KEEPS SILENT AND CRIES NO MERCY!
SMALL MATTER-- HA!
I WAGER WE'LL HEAR HIM WAIL LOUD ENOUGH WHEN OUR WHITE-HOT SPEAR TIPS SCORCH HIS BLASTED EYES!
ELSEWHERE, NEARBY...
FASTER, THOR, PAST THE WATER-FALL, THEN-- HOLD!
O, INFAMY-- HERE LIES A SLAUGHTERED INNOCENT.
VIDAR HAS WRONGLY SPENT HIS PASSION!
AYE, HODER, AND I NEARLY RODE HER BY.
IN YOUR DARKNESS YOU SEE MORE KEENLY THAN WE SIGHTED GODS.
IN MY MIND'S EYE I SEE A CASTLE GREY AND GAUNT AGAINST THE SKY.
FLY LIKE THE EAGLE, THUNDER GOD, I FEAR WE COME TOO LATE!

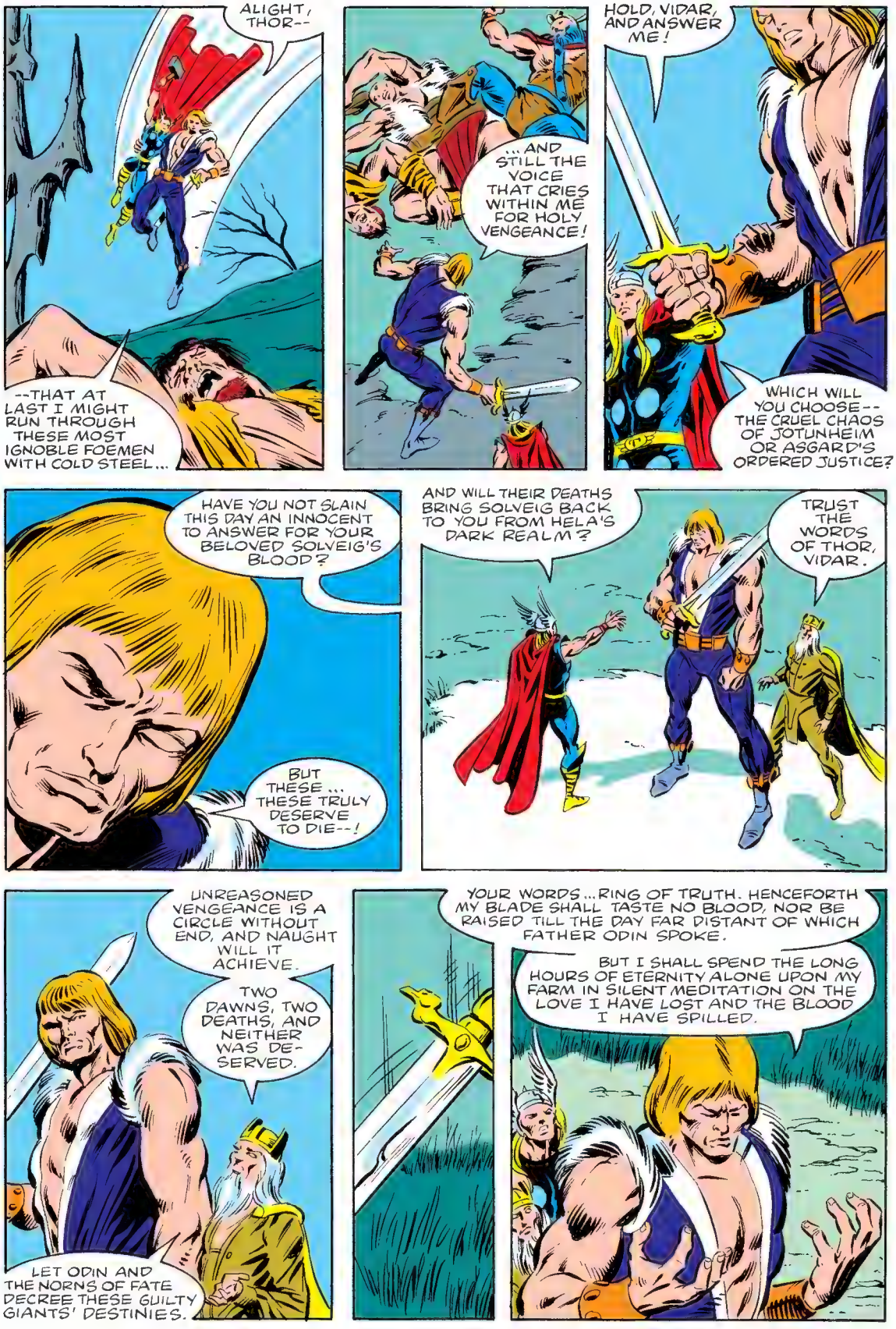
AND...
THIS TROLL-IRON SMOLDERS LIKE THE MOLTEN CHASM OF FLAME.
COME, ASLAK. LET'S GOUGE THE TRAITOR'S EYES FROM THEIR SOCKETS --
--THEN DRIVE HIM, CHARRED AND BLIND, ACROSS JOTUNHEIM, THE LAUGHINGSTOCK OF GIANT-KIND!
NAY, BASE VARLETS!
THRAAK!
VIDAR IS MY CHARGE BY ODIN'S WILL DIVINE!

AND THOR SHALL BE HIS SHIELD AND GUARDIAN!
'TIS THE THUNDER-GOD OF ASGARD!
HO! THEN WE SHALL FEAST ON GOD STEW THIS DAY!
BY MJOLNIR'S MIGHT, OGRE, YOUR SHATTERED JAW SHALL FEAST ON NAUGHT!
CRAAK
PUT... PUT ME DOWN... YOU BLASTED MITE, AND I'LL... I'LL STAMP YOU FLAT LIKE A FLEA--!

NOOOOO!
UNGPH!
THOSE FLAMES!
THE GIANTS' GLOWING SPEARS HAVE SET THE CASTLE ABLAZE.
OHH...I'M PUMMELED SORE!
VIDAR--I AM COMING!
QUICK--FLEE, FELLOWS, BEFORE WE ROAST LIKE MUTTON!
I CANNOT... ⁂KOFF⁂... BREATHE... THE SMOKE... IS SUFFO-CATING...


THESE HASPS AND CHAINS ARE FORGED TO WITHSTAND TEN GIANTS' MIGHT --
KRAK!
--YET THEY YIELD LIKE STRAW TO MY GODLY VIGOR.
COME, VIDAR, I SHALL CARRY YOU--
NAY, THOR, THOUGH MY LIMBS BE STIFF AS TIMBER, I AM MY OWN MAN STILL--
--AND YET CAN OUTRACE THE DEVOURING FLAMES.
HELA TAKE IT! THE CURSED DRAWBRIDGE WON'T GO ANY LOWER!
PUSH HARDER, HARDER, BEFORE THE FIRE SCORCHES OUR BOTTOMS LIKE FAFNIR'S BREATH!
CONFOUND! IT WILL NOT BUDGE!
'TIS FORTUNE'S STROKE THAT VIDAR LEFT BEHIND HIS STAFF ENCHANTED AND UNBREAKABLE. 'TWILL HOLD THE GIANTS CAPTIVE TILL HE AND THOR ARRIVE.

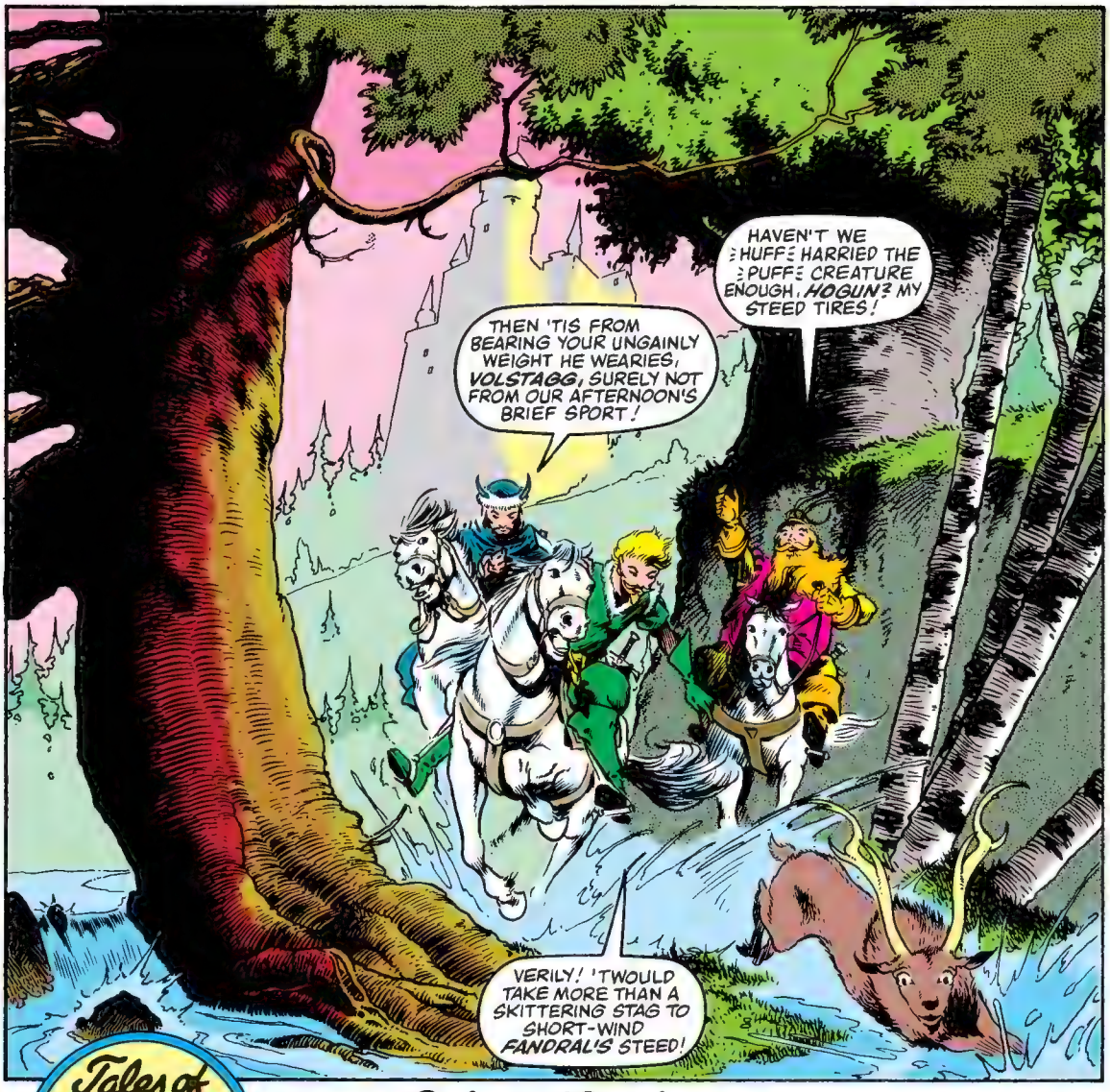

TO ONE SIDE, HODER!
MIGHTY MJOLNIR STRIKES!
OHHH!
THWAAM!
NOW, PROUD VIDAR--
--UNLESS YOU'VE A FALCON'S GIFT OF FLIGHT, YOU'LL LET ME LIFT YOU TO SAFETY ABOVE THE FALLING BRIDGE!
THUMP!
BATHUNK
THUD


ALIGHT, THOR--
--THAT AT LAST I MIGHT RUN THROUGH THESE MOST IGNOBLE FOEMEN WITH COLD STEEL...
...AND STILL THE VOICE THAT CRIES WITHIN ME FOR HOLY VENGEANCE!
HOLD, VIDAR, AND ANSWER ME!
WHICH WILL YOU CHOOSE-- THE CRUEL CHAOS OF JOTUNHEIM OR ASGARD'S ORDERED JUSTICE?
HAVE YOU NOT SLAIN THIS DAY AN INNOCENT TO ANSWER FOR YOUR BELOVED SOLVEIG'S BLOOD?
BUT THESE ... THESE TRULY DESERVE TO DIE--!
AND WILL THEIR DEATHS BRING SOLVEIG BACK TO YOU FROM HELA'S DARK REALM?
TRUST THE WORDS OF THOR, VIDAR.
UNREASONED VENGEANCE IS A CIRCLE WITHOUT END, AND NAUGHT WILL IT ACHIEVE.
TWO DAWNS, TWO DEATHS, AND NEITHER WAS DE-SERVED.
LET ODIN AND THE NORNS OF FATE DECREE THESE GUILTY GIANTS' DESTINIES.
YOUR WORDS ... RING OF TRUTH. HENCEFORTH MY BLADE SHALL TASTE NO BLOOD, NOR BE RAISED TILL THE DAY FAR DISTANT OF WHICH FATHER ODIN SPOKE.
BUT I SHALL SPEND THE LONG HOURS OF ETERNITY ALONE UPON MY FARM IN SILENT MEDITATION ON THE LOVE I HAVE LOST AND THE BLOOD I HAVE SPILLED.

THE NEXT DAWN...
I THANK THEE, MIGHTY THOR AND PRESCIENT HODER, FOR THY GUIDANCE AND FORBEARING.
NOW FAREWELL TO THEE BOTH.
CARRY MY RESPECTS TO ASGARD'S HALLOWED HALLS AND OUR FATHER ODIN.
NAY, VIDAR.
FATHER!
ODIN COMES TO THEE TO PAY ASGARD'S RESPECTS TO SOLVEIG'S MEMORY...
...AND TO BLESS THEE WITH A PERIOD OF PEACE AND HARMONY AS TRANQUIL AS THE STILLNESS OF THIS DAWN.
I THANK YOU, DEAR FATHER. ALL HAIL ODIN AND THE GODLY REALM!
THE END.

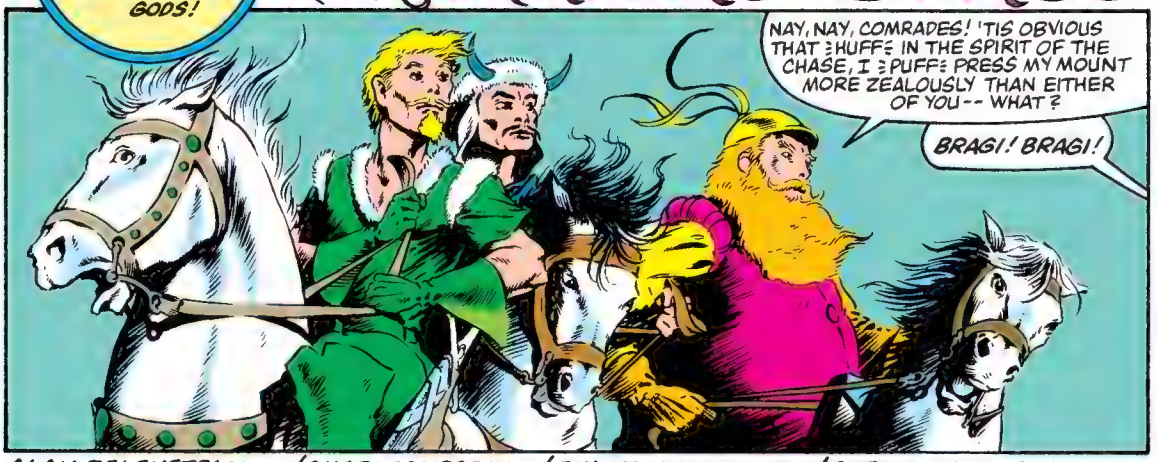
Marvel Fanfare #12 (January 1984) Thor pinup
by Rick Leonardi

SPECIAL BONUS: The Warriors Three go in search of the poet Bragi in a backup feature from *Marvel Fanfare* #13 (March 1984)


HAVEN'T WE ⁞HUFF⁞ HARRIED THE ⁞PUFF⁞ CREATURE ENOUGH, HOGUN? MY STEED TIRES!
THEN 'TIS FROM BEARING YOUR UNGAINLY WEIGHT HE WEARIES, VOLSTAGG, SURELY NOT FROM OUR AFTERNOON'S BRIEF SPORT!
VERILY! 'TWOULD TAKE MORE THAN A SKITTERING STAG TO SHORT-WIND FANDRAL'S STEED!

Tales of ASGARD
HOME OF THE MIGHTY NORSE GODS!

BALLAD of the WARRIORS THREE


NAY, NAY, COMRADES! 'TIS OBVIOUS THAT ⁞HUFF⁞ IN THE SPIRIT OF THE CHASE, I ⁞PUFF⁞ PRESS MY MOUNT MORE ZEALOUSLY THAN EITHER OF YOU -- WHAT?
BRAGI! BRAGI!

ALAN ZELENETZ: STORY/CHARLES VESS: ART/JIM NOVAK: LETTERING/CHRISTIE SCHEELE: COLOR

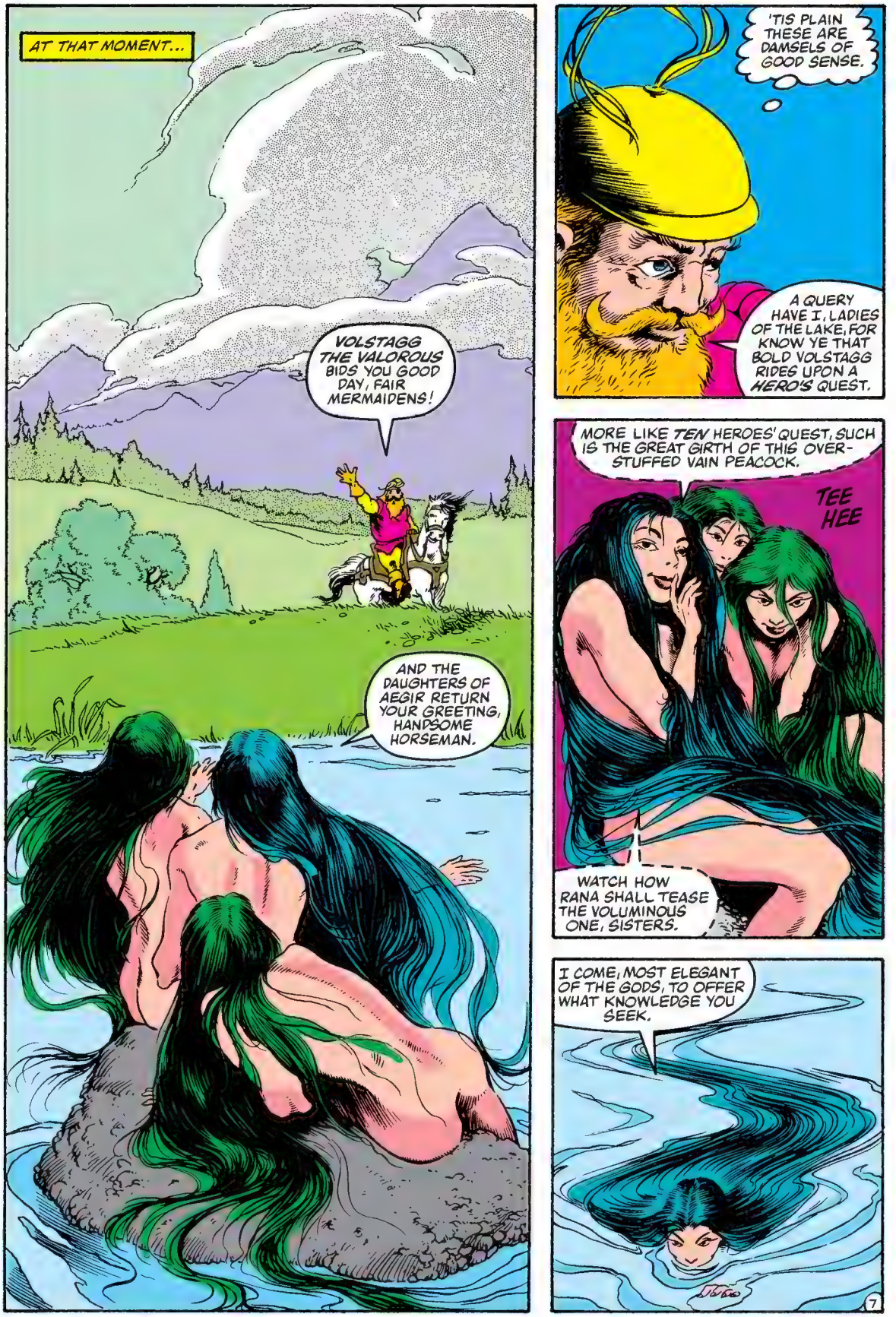
BRAGI...
MY LADY, IDUNN, WHAT EVER IS THE MATTER?
O, DASHING FANDRAL, MY HUSBAND BRAGI HAS DISAPPEARED.
TONIGHT IS ALL-FATHER ODIN'S GREAT MID-SUMMER CELEBRATION--
--AND BRAGI, AS BEFITS THE GOD OF POETRY, IS TO RECITE AT THE FESTIVITIES IN COURT.
HE STROLLED INTO THE FOREST EARLIER, BUT WHEN I LATER FOLLOWED, HE WAS GONE.
I FEAR THE WORST.
THE WORST IS BUT YOUR FEAR, DEAR GODDESS.
FOR THE WARRIORS THREE ARE AT YOUR SERVICE.
WE SHALL SEPARATE, THE BETTER TO SEARCH ASGARD'S GOLDEN REALM.
NOW SET YOUR HEART AT EASE, FAIR IDUNN.
I VOW WE SHALL BE BACK WITH BRAGI BEFORE THE HEARTHS ARE LIT IN ODIN'S BANQUET HALL.
2

SOON...
MAYHAP BRAGI WAS CARRIED AWAY BY JEALOUS DWARFS, FOR THEY ADMIRE GOOD POETRY AS MUCH AS DO THE GODS--
A NET OF GOLD FILIGREE!?
WHAT TRICKERY?!
HA! HA! HEE! HEE!
A STRANGER! WHEE!
STRANGER, IF YOU'D BE SET FREE, THEN YOU MUST PART WITH ONE OF THREE-- A JEWEL, OR RING, OR GOLD'S OUR FEE. STRANGER, SPEAK, WHICH SHALL IT BE?
3

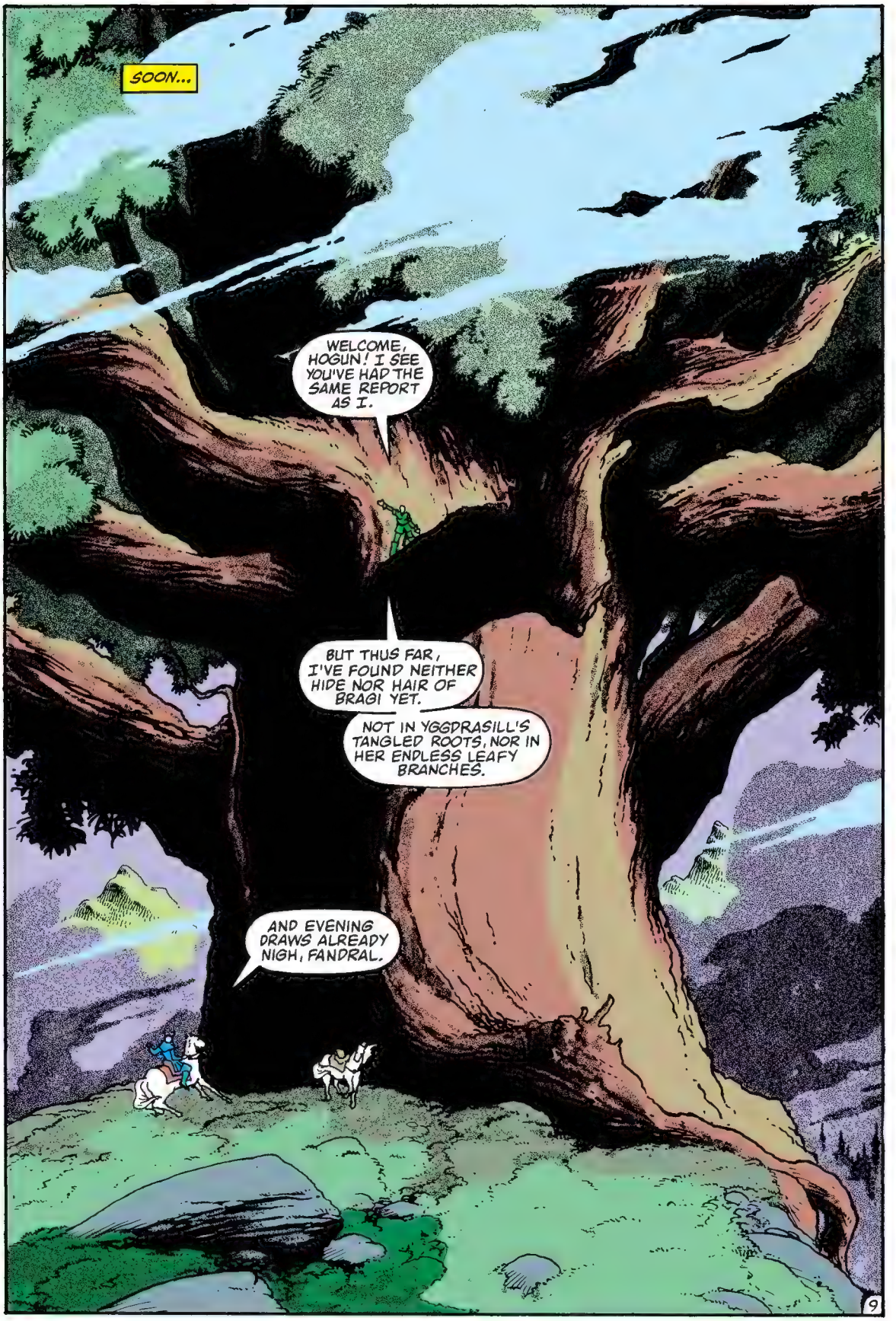
WILL YOU ACCEPT THE CUTTING EDGE OF MY BLADE, YOU MISSHAPEN CHURLS!?
N-NO!
BY THE TREASURE OF THE DWARF KING, LET US FLEE, BROTHER!
A THOUSAND PARDONS FOR MY CLUMSINESS!
OOPH
NOW, STRANGERS...
IF YOU'D LIVE TO COUNT YOUR HOARD ANOTHER DAY, TELL ME IF THE GOD OF POETRY PASSED THIS WAY.
AYE... AYE, ASGARDIAN, IF IT'S BRAGI YOU SPEAK OF. HE SOUGHT A LYRIC FROM US, ONE THAT HE MIGHT SING AT ODIN'S FEAST.
BUT WE'D NOT PART WITH ANY OF OUR SONGS AND TOLD HIM TO SEEK VERSES AMID THE BRANCHES OF YGGDRASILL THE WORLD-TREE.
YOU DWARFS ARE GREEDIER THAN SQUIRRELS WITH ACORNS--WHAT COST TO YOU TO SHARE MERE WORDS?
OFF TO THE WORLD-TREE THEN!
4

MEANWHILE...
BRAGI?
PERHAPS YOU'VE WANDERED UP HERE, LORD OF POETRY?
EH? WHENCE DOES THAT SUDDEN SHADOW FALL?
WHAT--!?
WHO DARES IMPRISON HOGUN THE GRIM?!
BY QUEEN KNORDA'S BEAUTY, 'TIS A TINY GODLING I TRAPPED WITHIN MY DRINKING GOURD!
A MOUNTAIN GIANT!
I'LL KNOCK YOU SENSELESS, LITTLE ONE, THEN ROAST YOU ON AN OPEN SPIT!
NAY, OGRE, METHINKS YOU MEASURE THE FLEECE BEFORE THE SHEEP IS SHORN.
5

THEN I'LL SKIN YOU ALIVE, BOASTFUL MITE!
WHAT? WHERE'S THE INSECT GONE?
THIS BLOW BEHIND THE KNEE WILL UPSET THY BALANCE, TALL ONE--
--TOPPLING THEE OVER THE CLIFFSIDE.
OH! MY BONES FEEL BENT AND BROKEN!
AND YOUR TOPKNOT WILL HANG FROM MY BELT IF YOU DON'T ANSWER AT ONCE--HAVE YOU SEEN THE GOD OF POETRY THIS DAY?
AYE, HE SOUGHT A POEM TO RECITE AT YOUR KING ODIN'S FEAST.
BUT WE GIANTS ARE EVER AT ODDS WITH ASGARD, AND I WOULD NOT SHARE OUR RHYMES WITH MY ENEMY.
I TOLD HIM TO SEEK SONGS AT THE FOOT OF THE WORLD-TREE.
THEN THERE MUST I HIE.
6

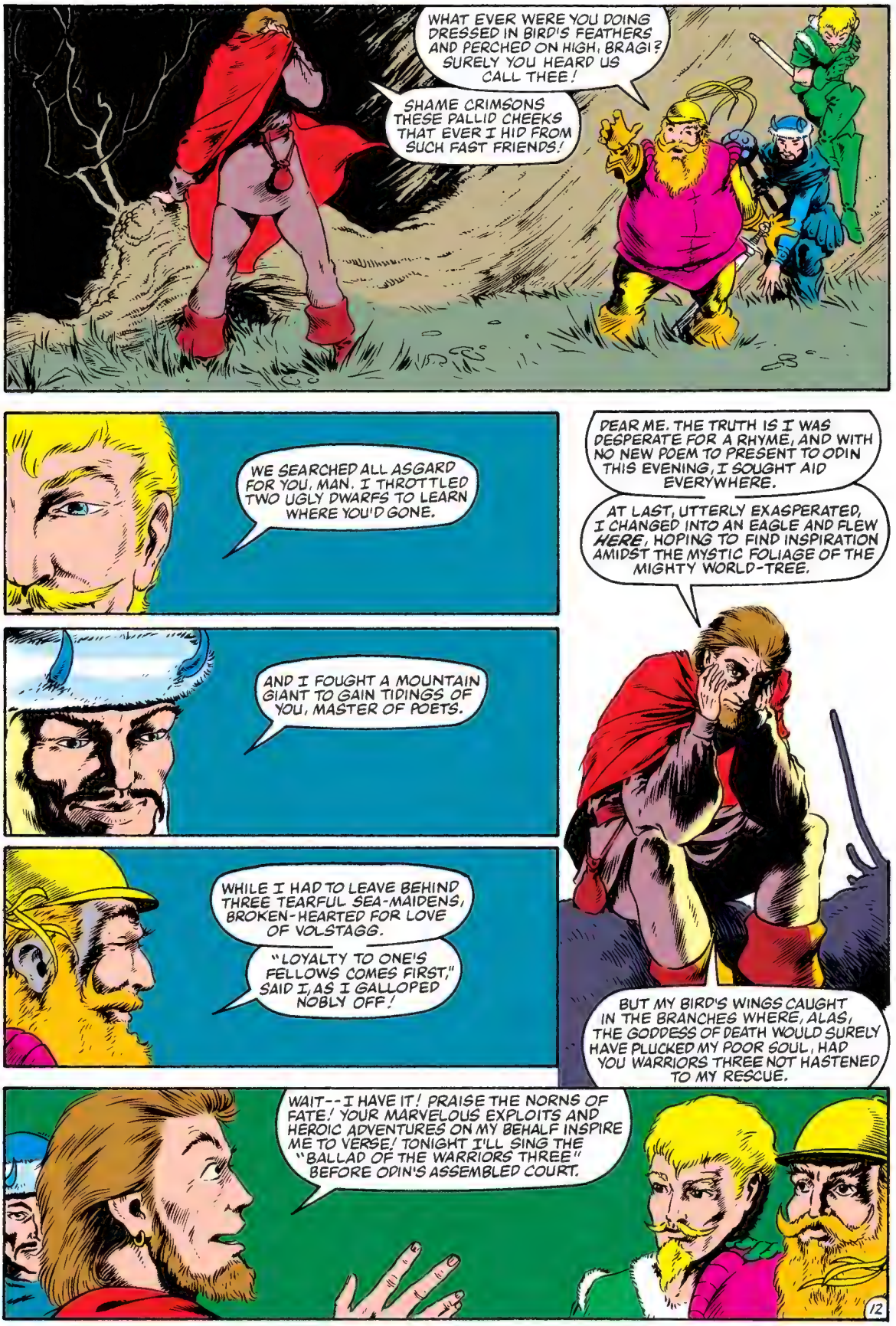

AT THAT MOMENT...
VOLSTAGG THE VALOROUS BIDS YOU GOOD DAY, FAIR MERMAIDENS!
AND THE DAUGHTERS OF AEGIR RETURN YOUR GREETING, HANDSOME HORSEMAN.
'TIS PLAIN THESE ARE DAMSELS OF GOOD SENSE.
A QUERY HAVE I, LADIES OF THE LAKE, FOR KNOW YE THAT BOLD VOLSTAGG RIDES UPON A HERO'S QUEST.
MORE LIKE TEN HEROES' QUEST, SUCH IS THE GREAT GIRTH OF THIS OVER-STUFFED VAIN PEACOCK.
TEE HEE
WATCH HOW RANA SHALL TEASE THE VOLUMINOUS ONE, SISTERS.
I COME, MOST ELEGANT OF THE GODS, TO OFFER WHAT KNOWLEDGE YOU SEEK.
7

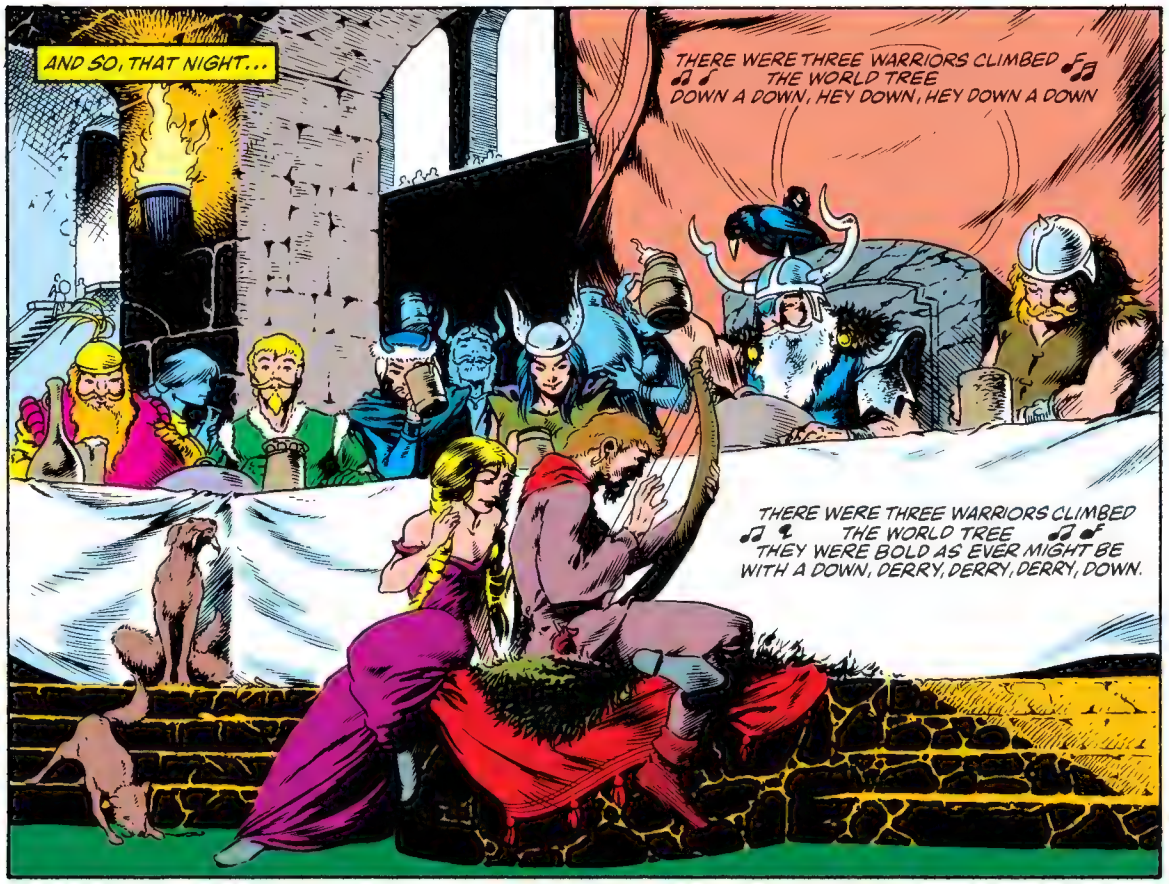
BUT YOU MUST BEND TO MY LIPS GRACIOUS ONE, THAT I MIGHT WHISPER SOFTLY IN YOUR EAR.
A PLEASURE I'D NOT DENY MYSELF, SWEET MAID--OOPH!
OD'S BLOOD! YOU'VE TUMBLED ME, VIXEN!
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE, SISTER? VOLSTAGG'S CORPULENCE CAUSES OUR LAKE TO OVER-FLOW ITS BANKS!
AYE, AND I'LL SPLASH ABOUT 'TIL THE LAKE'S ALL DRY AND YOU'RE STRANDED ON THAT ROCK--
--UNLESS YOU UNRIDDLE ME THIS... HAS BRAGI, THE GENTLE GOD OF POETRY, PASSED THIS WAY?
HE DID, VOLSTAGG--
--SEEKING VERSES FOR THE GREAT MID-SUMMER EVE'S REVELS.
BUT WE COULD GIVE HIM NAUGHT, FOR A SEA-MAIDEN'S SONG HAS NO MELODY ON SHORE.
WE ADVISED HIM THE WORLD-TREE'S WHERE POETIC INSPIRATION MIGHT BE FOUND.
THEN: UMPH: IT'S: OOF: TO THE WORLD-TREE FOR ME!
IF I CAN BUT MOUNT MY STEED!
HNNH
PHEW--COME! OFF WITH YOU, IRON SHANKS!
8


SOON...
WELCOME, HOGUN! I SEE YOU'VE HAD THE SAME REPORT AS I.
BUT THUS FAR, I'VE FOUND NEITHER HIDE NOR HAIR OF BRAGI YET.
NOT IN YGGDRASILL'S TANGLED ROOTS, NOR IN HER ENDLESS LEAFY BRANCHES.
AND EVENING DRAWS ALREADY NIGH, FANDRAL.
9

GRIM HOGUN SHALL LEND ASSISTANCE, DASHING ONE.
FOR WE HAVE GIVEN THE GODDESS IDUNN OUR TROTH AND PLEDGE.
HELP! OH, HELP!
HARK-- 'TIS BRAGI'S VOICE, THOUGH, BY YMIR'S ICY VEINS, I SEE HIM NOT.
FANDRAL, HOGUN, CAN YOU HEAR ME?
HSSS
HELP! HERE AM I IN EAGLE'S GUISE, TANGLED IN THE WORLD-TREE'S FOLIAGE!
HASTEN, HOGUN! MINE THE TASK TO DISTRACT YON OVERGROWN SERPENT--
--'TIL YOU'VE SET BRAGI FREE!
A TASK, FRIEND FANDRAL, EASIER SAID THAN DONE-- OH!
INDEED, THE CREATURE'S CONSTRICTING COILS ARE MIGHTIER THAN EVER I SUPPOSED--UNPH!
10

CRACK
HOGUN, LOOK! IT'S VOLSTAGG FALLING FROM ABOVE!
NOW HE KNOCKS THE DEADLY SNAKE UNCONSCIOUS--
--AND WE'RE FREE!
I--UM--WAS CLIMBING FOR FRUIT TO GIVE ME STRENGTH--FOR VERILY THIS NOBLE QUEST IS OVERTAXING--
--WHEN I HEARD YOUR CRY-AND--UM--HASTENED TO YOUR AID.
MORE LIKELY YOU LOST YOUR FOOTING AND TUMBLED TO OUR AID, CLUMSY FELLOW, FOR WHICH OUR THANKS.
BRAGI SHOULD BE SOMEWHERE NEAR THIS TREE.
WE'VE ALREADY FOUND THE GOD OF POETRY, SO HEARTY APPETITE, PRINCE OF THE PAUNCH!
HOLD WELL, BRAGI--YOU'RE FREE!
MAY ODIN SHOWER TEN THOUSAND BLESSINGS UPON THEE AND THINE, BRAVE WARRIORS.
FOR A MOMENT THERE I BELIEVED I HAD GAZED UPON MY VERY LAST SUNSET.
11


WHAT EVER WERE YOU DOING DRESSED IN BIRD'S FEATHERS AND PERCHED ON HIGH, BRAGI? SURELY YOU HEARD US CALL THEE!
SHAME CRIMSONS THESE PALLID CHEEKS THAT EVER I HID FROM SUCH FAST FRIENDS!
WE SEARCHED ALL ASGARD FOR YOU, MAN. I THROTTLED TWO UGLY DWARFS TO LEARN WHERE YOU'D GONE.
AND I FOUGHT A MOUNTAIN GIANT TO GAIN TIDINGS OF YOU, MASTER OF POETS.
WHILE I HAD TO LEAVE BEHIND THREE TEARFUL SEA-MAIDENS, BROKEN-HEARTED FOR LOVE OF VOLSTAGG.
"LOYALTY TO ONE'S FELLOWS COMES FIRST," SAID I, AS I GALLOPED NOBLY OFF!
DEAR ME. THE TRUTH IS I WAS DESPERATE FOR A RHYME, AND WITH NO NEW POEM TO PRESENT TO ODIN THIS EVENING, I SOUGHT AID EVERYWHERE.
AT LAST, UTTERLY EXASPERATED, I CHANGED INTO AN EAGLE AND FLEW HERE, HOPING TO FIND INSPIRATION AMIDST THE MYSTIC FOLIAGE OF THE MIGHTY WORLD-TREE.
BUT MY BIRD'S WINGS CAUGHT IN THE BRANCHES WHERE, ALAS, THE GODDESS OF DEATH WOULD SURELY HAVE PLUCKED MY POOR SOUL, HAD YOU WARRIORS THREE NOT HASTENED TO MY RESCUE.
WAIT--I HAVE IT! PRAISE THE NORNS OF FATE! YOUR MARVELOUS EXPLOITS AND HEROIC ADVENTURES ON MY BEHALF INSPIRE ME TO VERSE! TONIGHT I'LL SING THE "BALLAD OF THE WARRIORS THREE" BEFORE ODIN'S ASSEMBLED COURT.
12


AND SO, THAT NIGHT...
THERE WERE THREE WARRIORS CLIMBED THE WORLD TREE DOWN A DOWN, HEY DOWN, HEY DOWN A DOWN
THERE WERE THREE WARRIORS CLIMBED THE WORLD TREE THEY WERE BOLD AS EVER MIGHT BE WITH A DOWN, DERRY, DERRY, DERRY, DOWN.

AH, POETRY. 'TIS A MYSTERY EVEN BEYOND THE ALL-FATHER'S KEN.
YOUR FANCIFUL FLIGHTS OF IMAGINATION, GENTLE BRAGI, ARE EVER PLEASING. AYE, THE ENDLESS FABRICATIONS YOU SPIN SO DELIGHTFULLY OUT OF THIN AIR NEVER CEASE TO AMAZE US.

I THANK YOU HUMBLY, MY LIEGE. WHEN ONE HAS RHYMED AND VERSIFIED SO LONG AS I, ONE NEVER LACKS FOR INSPIRATION.

·END·

C.VESS-83

The Mighty Thor #337 promo poster (17" x 23")
by Walter Simonson

The Mighty Thor #337 promo poster original art
by Walter Simonson

Courtesy Walter Simonson

Marvel Age #6 (September 1983) talks with Walter Simonson about his philosophy for Thor and channeling Jack Kirby.

WALT SIMONSON TACKLES THE MIGHTY THOR®

by Patrick Daniel O'Neil

Walt Simonson remembers JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY STARRING THOR #120 as the first Marvel comic he ever bought. And since that time, Simonson's favorite super hero has been the golden-tressed thunder god. Now, beginning with issue #337, Thor's adventures will be written, penciled and inked by Walt Simonson. MARVEL AGE MAGAZINE talked to Simonson about his plans for the Asgardian Avenger.

MARVEL AGE: Will you be altering the direction of THOR?

WALT SIMONSON: I have some major changes in mind. There are two major directions: One feeling I have about THOR is that the book has gotten extremely top-heavy. For example, you have a zillion pantheons of deities all floating around. When Hercules showed up the first time it was great – but now, you've got Egyptian gods, Incan gods, Hindu gods. After a while, in that company, Thor is just one more super-powered guy. It may be that he's the best of all those guys – but Thor sort of gets lost in the shuffle. I plan to do some major surgery on the vast supporting cast that has grown around the lead character in the last twenty years. I don't want to get too specific and ruin any surprises.

One thing I can say: in the very first Thor story, when Don Blake finds the magic walking stick/hammer, the hammer says: "Whosoever holds the hammer, if he be worthy, shall have the power of Thor". That was the deal, originally. In my first issue, somebody else finds the hammer who's worthy. It kind of leaves Don Blake stuck.

MA: But Don Blake is Thor, spiritually and physically.

WS: I don't dispute that. All I'm saying is that the original deal was whoever held the hammer, if he was worthy, would have the power of Thor.

The other thing I'm going to do is build in a framing device. The device itself consists of a two-page introduction showing a mysterious figure and

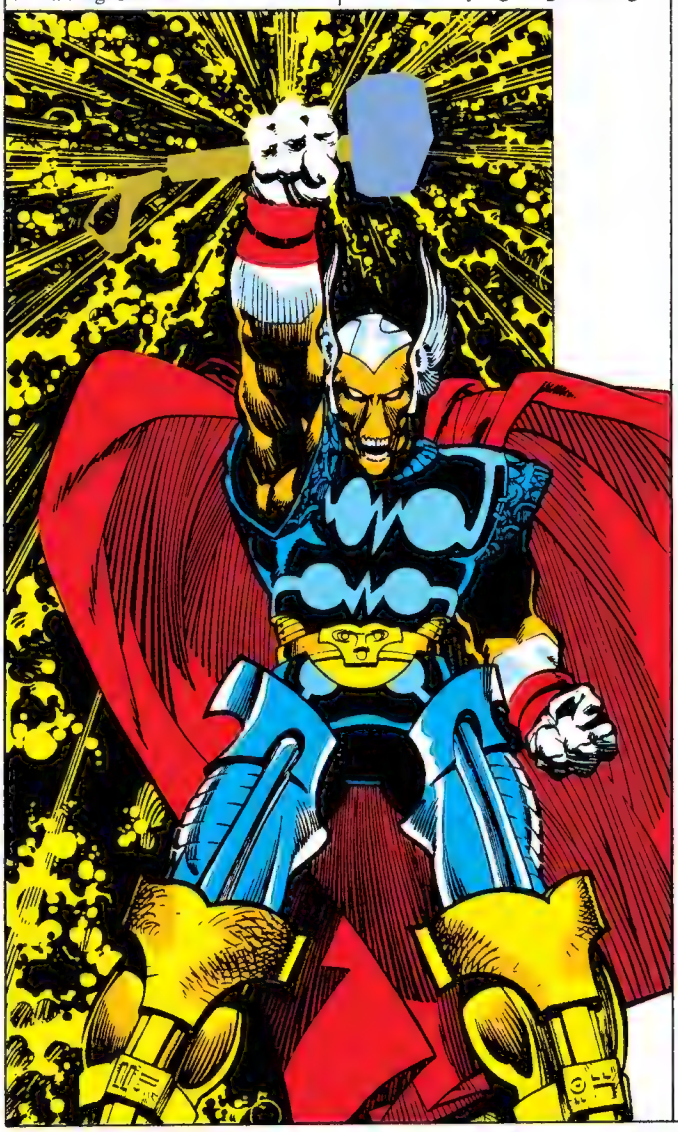
The *Marvel Age* #6 article was supported by Walter Simonson's *Thor* #337 house ad and promo poster artwork.

some mysterious goings-on, all of which will be revealed as time goes by. I'm going to use the framing device to try and create a unity in the book, in among the characters themselves. And a unity of purpose behind the book. I'd like to create a sort of underlying unity among the characters, both on Earth and in Asgard.

MA: Will the current storyline be completely tied up before you begin your changes?

WS: That will be all taken care of. I'm a long-time fan of Thor. Basically, I would like to make Thor an interesting book to read, and to do that I'd like to make the book an interesting book to create. I expect I will be doing a sort of classic Thor. I don't expect to change the character of Thor... but I'd like to enlarge on Thor's character and on those of the characters that surround him.

An example: Odin's very existence causes a lot of problems. He's so powerful that when Thor can't handle a really big danger Odin gets draggged in to take care of it. Or else you get Odin against Thor. Odin says, "Son, you've been proud for the 334th time – once too often – and I'm gonna nail you to the wall!" This always struck me as funny – of all the characters in that book who needed lessons in humility, Thor is maybe number *two* in line. So, I'd like to make Odin brighter and put him more in the background.



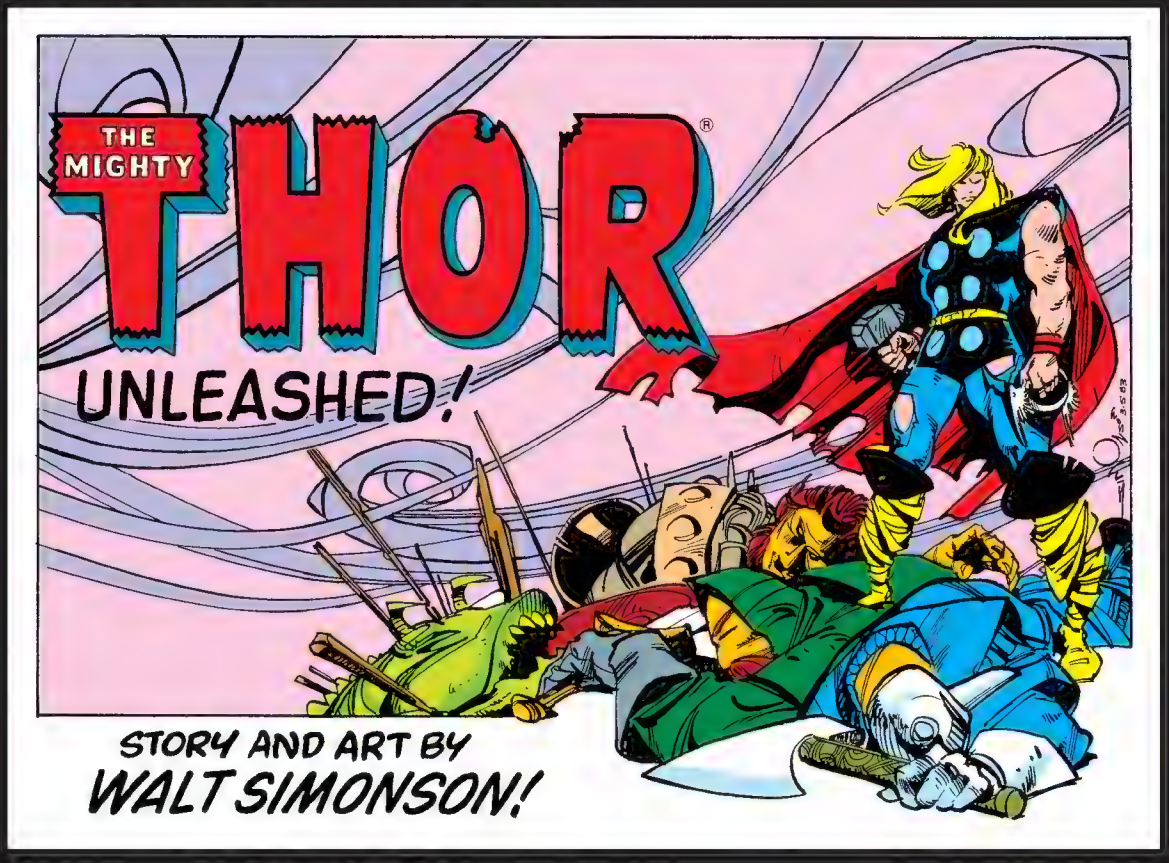
MA: This is more than just a break in continuity in writing. With you doing the artwork it's a break in the art style as well.

WS: There will be a difference in terms of inking, but I think a lot of what I'm doing in terms of drawing will owe a lot to Jack Kirby's version of Thor. Thor, when he throws a punch, will always have his feet spread eight feet apart. That's part of the visual vocabulary of super heroes that Kirby created and I don't think anybody's come up with a better vocabulary since then. Since Kirby began doing super heroes, either you borrow heavily from his vocabulary or you ignore it. It's almost a conscious choice to do one or the other. I think Jack is that important to the look of super heroes and to the creation of an entire visual vocabulary for them in a way nobody else has ever been.

On the other hand, when I was drawing Thor a few years ago, I used a lot of "Kirbyoid" motifs in the costumes and buildings. I still inted to do that, at least initially, so a lot of the pencils will own something to the best THORs of the past. Whether people will see past the inking to that, I don't know. I would eventually like to introduce new motifs into the book. Asgard will remain the lump of rock floating in space with the rainbow attached. That was a great piece of drawing – nothing I can do will be any better than that. But I do intend to introduce the dragonheads from Viking ships and the interwoven design work of a lot of Viking tools and artifacts.

What I want to do is the best of the concepts that Stan Lee and Jack Kirby created and add something new as well.

House ads for Walter Simonson's *Thor* #337 debut appeared on letters pages across Marvel's October and November 1983 titles.



AtlantaCon 1983 Thor pinup
by Walter Simonson

Courtesy Walter Simonson

Thor figure studies by Walter Simonson, dated 9/15/1983 (left) and 10/1983 (facing page bottom)

This early Lorelei sketch by Walter Simonson shows the influence Blondie lead singer Debbie Harry had on the character's look.

Odin character study by Walter Simonson, dated 2/29/1984

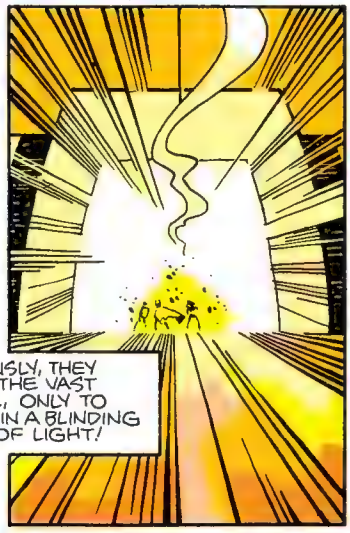
Courtesy Walter Simonson

The Mighty Thor #341 cover corner box art by Walter Simonson

The Mighty Thor #342 letters page revealed the panels concealed on issue #341 page 2 where Thor made his exit to Battleworld for the *Secret Wars* event series.

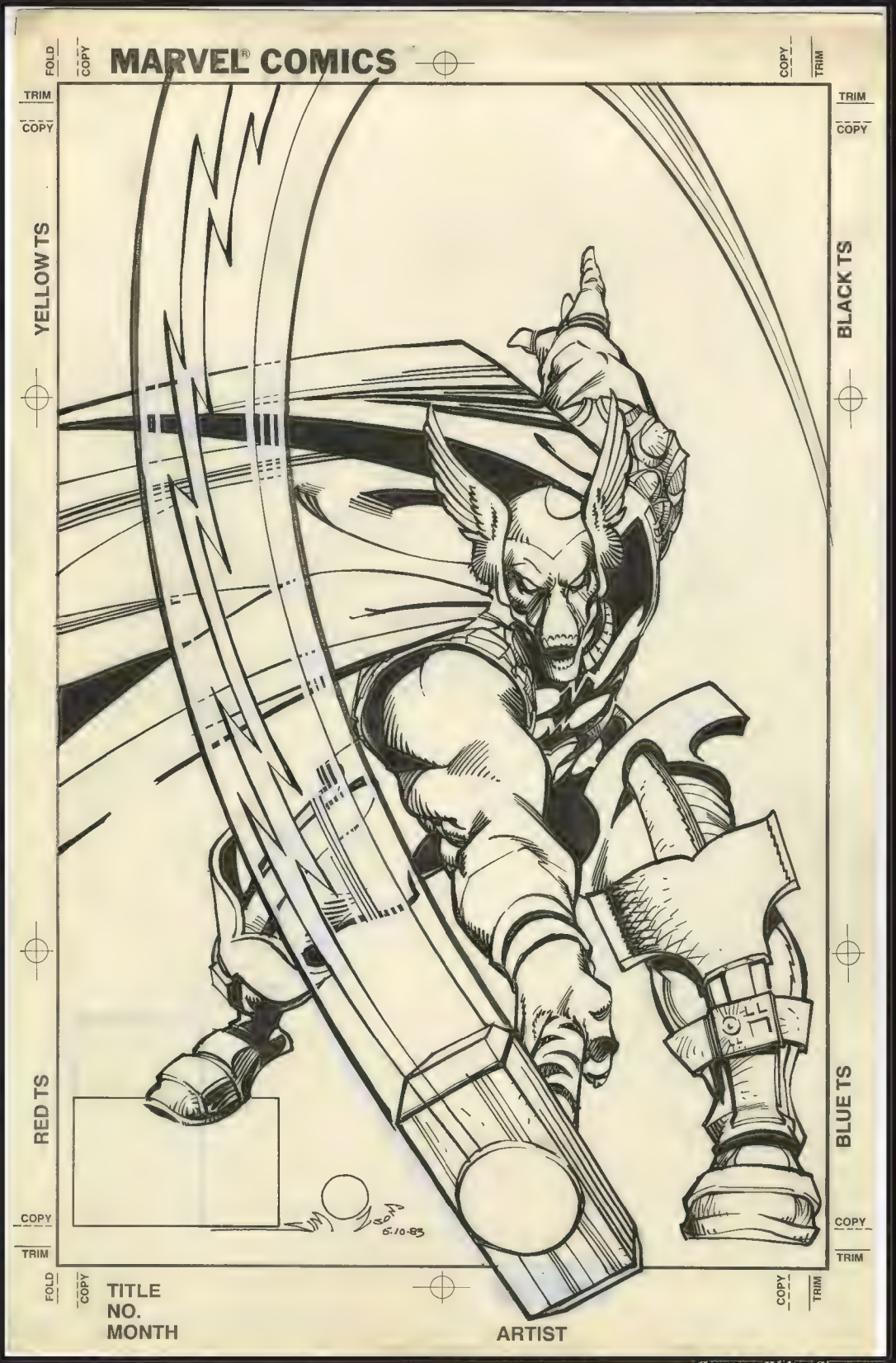
Now they can be shown **— last month's Mystery Panels! Clip and paste them on page two of *THOR #341*. For the climactic continuation of this saga, see *AVENGERS #242* and then *MARVEL SUPER HEROES: SECRET WARS #1* on sale soon!**

...ONLY TO EMERGE SHORTLY WITH THE OTHER AVENGERS AS THEY DASH INTO CENTRAL PARK...



CUT ALONG DOTTED LINE

The Mighty Thor #337 cover original art
by Walter Simonson



Courtesy Walter Simonson

The Mighty Thor #338 cover original art
by Walter Simonson

Courtesy Walter Simonson

Walter Simonson's initial script for *The Mighty Thor* #337 included a prologue (scratched out at top) that he elected to cut to get straight to the "DOOM!"

THOR 337 - pp 1 - 3

In olden days, bards began their tales with invocations to the gods of story. Let us begin this one with a plea to Braggi, the Norse god of poetry, that he may help us make our tale as sweet and grim as the wild elements of the northland.

p1

Far beyond the fields we know, the core of an ancient galaxy...

...explodes!

And a molten ingot of star-stuff is left behind...

...but not left alone.

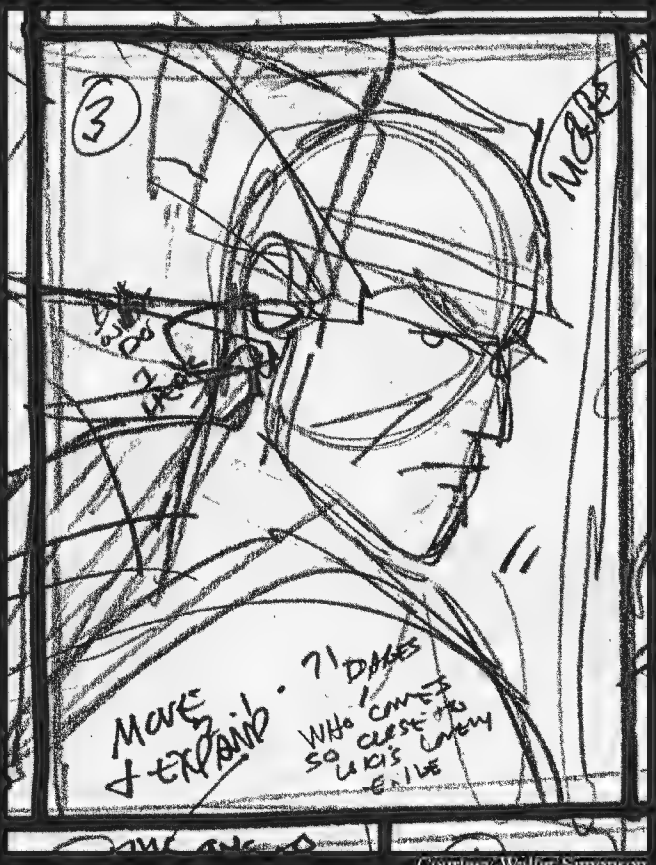
p2 Mark well this figure and listen. Listen.

p3 Can you hear it? The wind is rising.

The sound of thunder reverberates throughout a billion billion worlds.

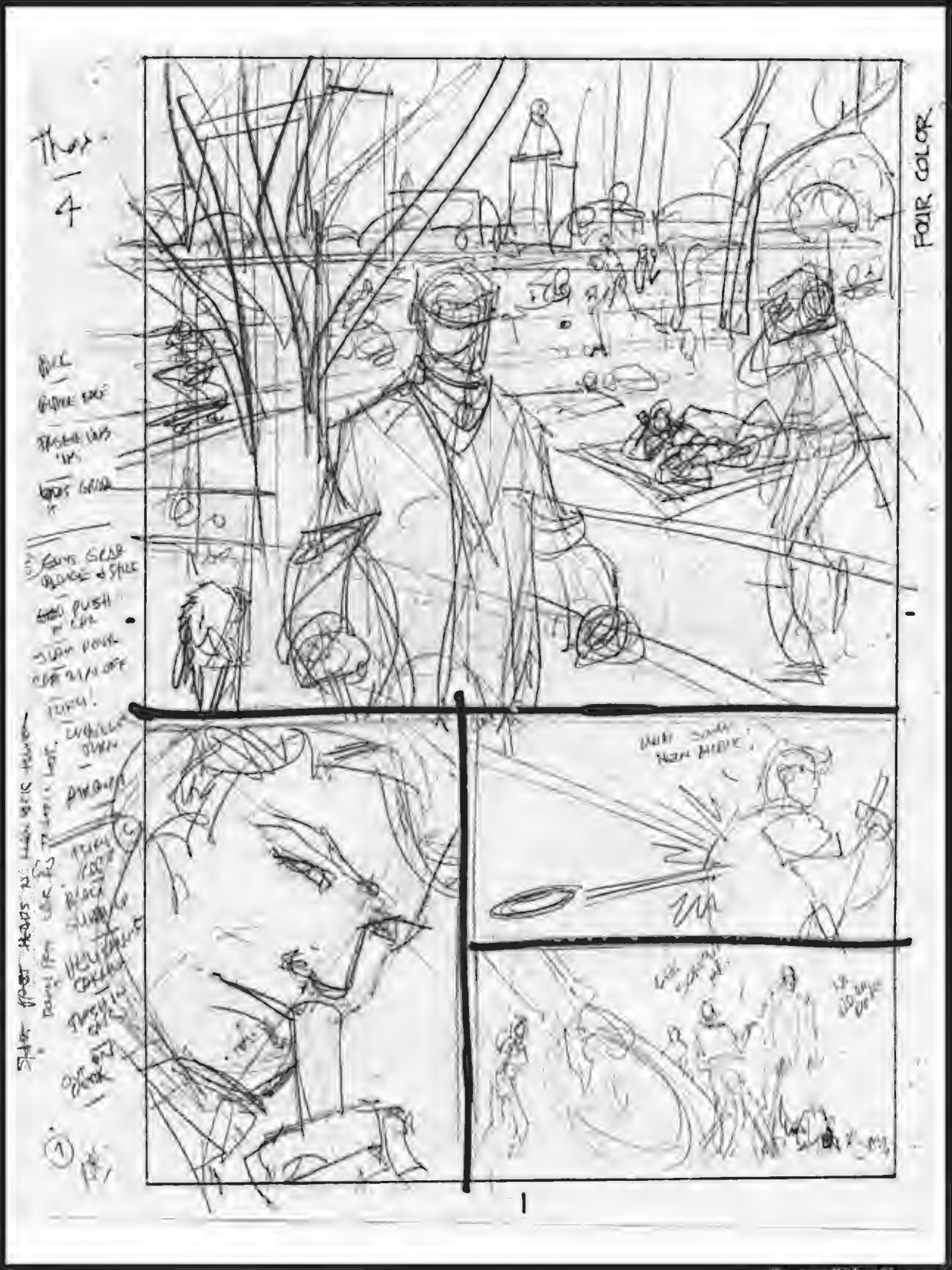
Simonson drew rough layout sketches to establish the visual pacing and storytelling of his emerging epic. These layouts offer a look into the creative process of a comic art master and also reveal where Simonson made a few changes made along the way. (See page 4 panel 1 and page 8 panel 1.)

At right: *The Mighty Thor* #337 page 13 Loki head sketch



Courtesy Walter Simonson

The Mighty Thor #337 page 4 layout sketch
by Walter Simonson

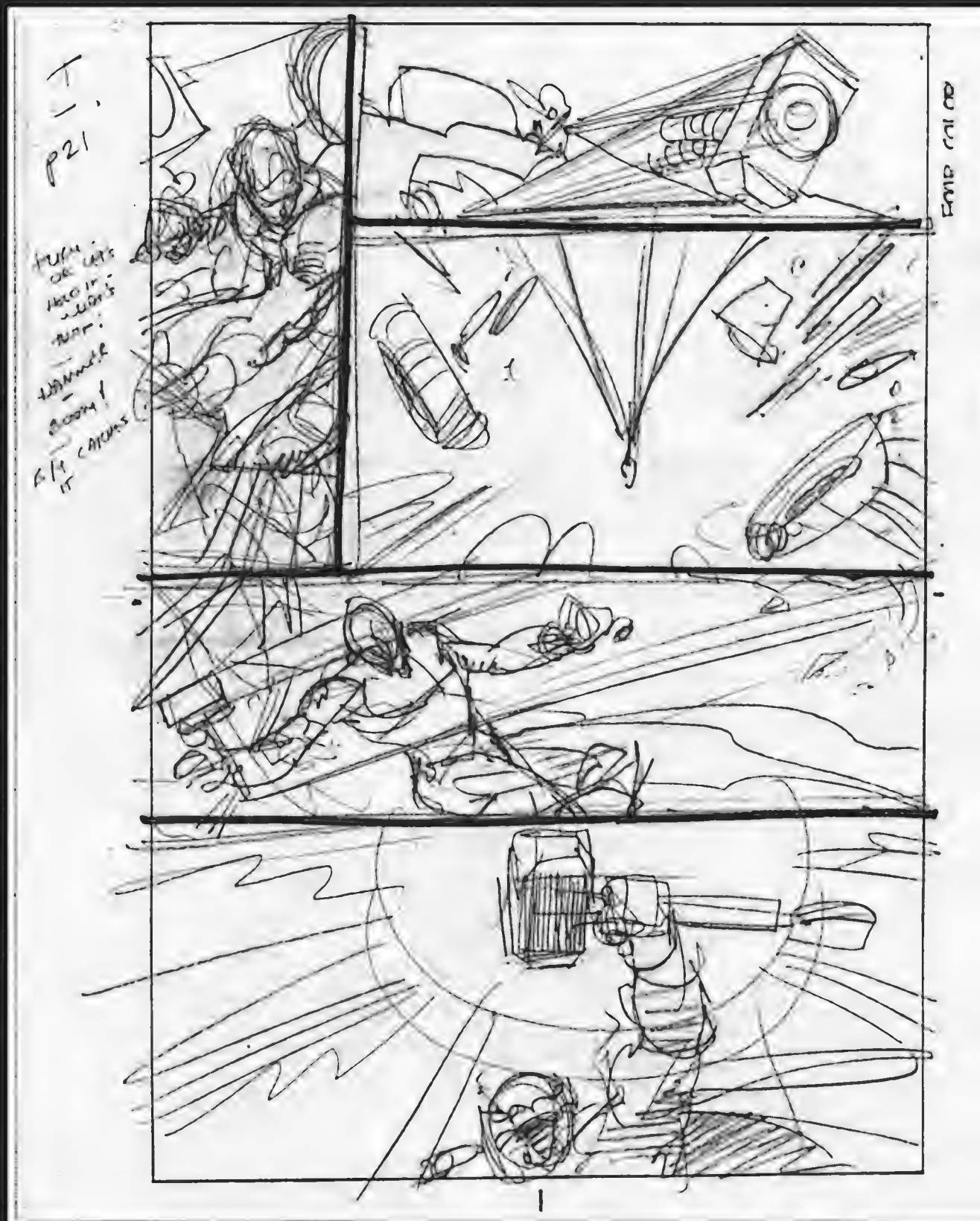


Courtesy Walter Simonson

The Mighty Thor #337 page 8 layout sketch
by Walter Simonson

Courtesy Walter Simonson

The Mighty Thor #337 page 21 layout sketch
by Walter Simonson



Courtesy Walter Simonson

The Mighty Thor #337 page 15 layout sketch
by Walter Simonson

Courtesy Walter Simonson

The Mighty Thor #337 page 15 original art
by Walter Simonson

MIGHTY THOR
#337
19
MEANWHILE, ABOARD THE ALIEN SHIP...
BRAASH!
WHAT MANNER OF BEING IS THIS WHO SO CAVALIERLY TOSSES THE GOD OF THUNDER ABOUT LIKE A BALE OF NEW-MOWN HAY?
RISE UP, DEMON!
YOU HAVE PURSUED ME ONLY TO FIND DEATH!
AND WHEN I AM THROUGH WITH YOU, YOU WILL WELCOME IT!
I AM CALLED BILL--BETA RAY BILL!
15

Courtesy Walter Simonson

The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe (1983-84) character profile pencil art by Walter Simonson

Courtesy Walter Simonson

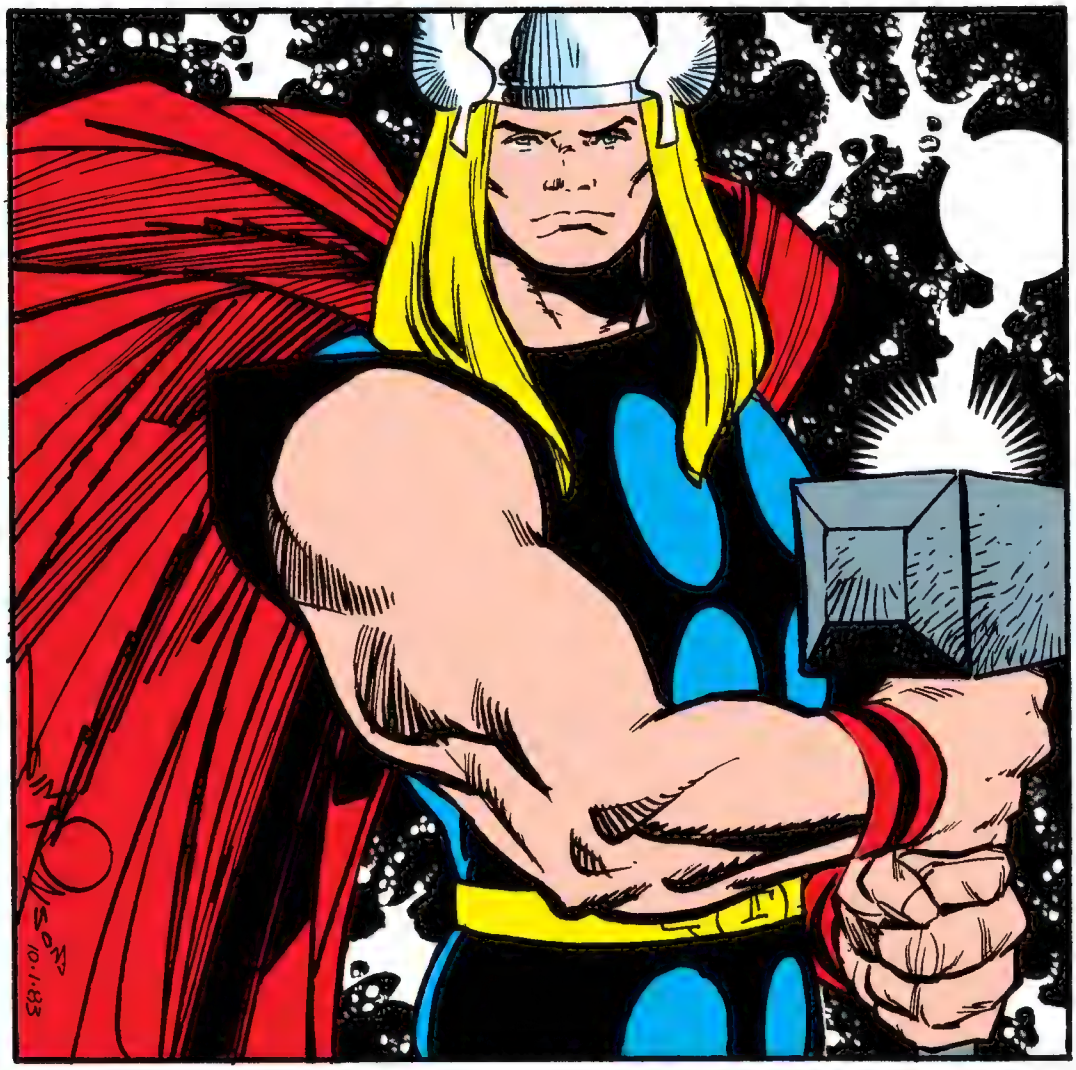
The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe (1983-84) character profile pencil art by Walter Simonson

Courtesy Walter Simonson

Tales of Asgard #1 (February 1984) cover
by Walter Simonson

Reprinting Tales of Asgard stories from *The Mighty Thor* #129-136

Comics Interview #9 (March 1984) cover
by Walter Simonson



The Marvel Fumetti Book #1 (April 1984) investigated the Bullpen and came out with photographic evidence, including this one-pager with the Simonsons.

SECRETS BEHIND THE COMICS!

STARRING WALT and LOUISE SIMONSON

STORY: MIKE CARLIN **PHOTOS: VINCE COLLETTA** **SPECIAL EFFECTS: ARTHUR ADAMS**

Comics Collector #4 (Summer 1984) cover
by Walter Simonson

Thor: The Ballad of Beta Ray Bill TPB (1989) cover
by Walter Simonson

$9.95 US
$11.95 CAN
£5.50 UK
ISBN 0-87135-614-7
MARVEL COMICS
the mighty
THOR
The hammer, Mjolnir, supreme weapon of the gods, was forged in the smithies of the dwarves and enchanted by Allfather Odin. His spell decreed that "Whosoever holds this hammer, if he be worthy, shall possess the power of Thor." None save Thor, son of Odin and god of thunder, has ever held Mjolnir and possessed its matchless power. None . . . till now.

Reprinting *The Mighty Thor* #337-340

INTRODUCTION

BY WALTER SIMONSON

FROM THOR: THE BALLAD OF BETA RAY BILL TPB (1989)

The ballad of Beta Ray Bill began as an idea.

I had been asked by then-editor Mark Gruenwald to take over *Thor* as both writer and artist and I wanted to start my work on the title with something unusual, something different, something unique. Something that had never been done in *Thor* before.

My model for such a beginning came from the work that Jack Kirby had done for DC Comics some thirteen years earlier. When Jack began his Fourth World tetralogy for DC, he took the name *Jimmy Olsen*, and revamped it completely. His first issue of Superman's Pal was as different from the preceding issues as chalk is from cheese! The issue was riveting. It exploded with new ideas, new characters, new situations. I didn't have as many ideas as Jack; no one does. But I definitely wanted to begin my run on *Thor* with as dramatic a break from the preceding issues as I possibly could.

Thor's enchanted hammer seemed like the right place to start. Besides Thor and Odin, no one had ever been able to lift it. The enchantment on the hammer, as longtime readers know, decreed that "Whosoever holds this hammer, if he be worthy, shall possess the power of Thor." It seemed like a good place to start. And that meant finding someone to hold the hammer who was not only worthy, but interesting, a character full of his own innate nobility, tragedy and responsibilities. This was no opportunity to waste on some parochial hero.

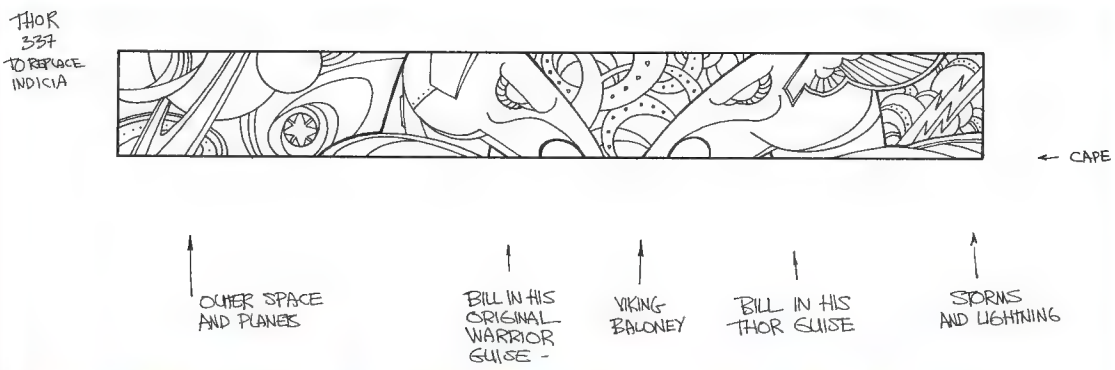
Visually, Bill was designed to play against type. American comics are primarily a short story form. As a result, symbols are used relentlessly as an aid to shorthand communications in the medium. Which means that in the main, good guys look like good guys, and bad guys look like bad guys. An Adonis-like god who came to Earth and picked up Thor's hammer would surprise no one. A monster who did the same thing would be startling. I needed a monster. At the same time, the underlying nobility of the character could still be suggested. Bill's face was designed with a horse skull in mind. Few animals are so noble or beautiful as the horse.

Bill's name was another matter. I wanted a common name, a symbol of the hero's identification with every man, even if he himself was quite unique. And I also wanted something with a slight sci-fi flavor. I had in fact originally thought of calling him "Beta Ray Jones" since Jones is such a stereotypical last name, but felt that as Marvel already had several Joneses in various comics (and editorial positions), I'd best look elsewhere for a name. And I liked the alliteration.

From such considerations was Beta Ray Bill born, a character unique even among his own kind, a combination of savior and pariah, noble enough to sacrifice himself and his happiness for his people, human enough to be hurt by their rejection. Most comics are a team effort and Thor was no exception. Thanks are due Mark Gruenwald and Mike Carlin, who helped on the editorial side of the book. And I'd like to give a note of special appreciation to John Workman, whose distinctive lettering and sound effects gave the book so much of its graphic quality. Without the efforts of these fine folks, Bill's realization would have been a good deal less effective.

October 8, 1989

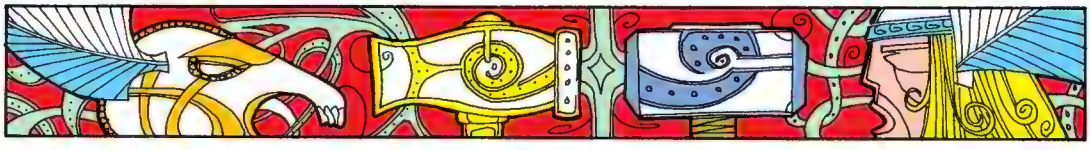
For the *Thor: The Ballad of Beta Ray Bill* TPB Walter Simonson drew new art patches to occupy the space where the original legal statements (indicia) appeared at the bottom of each issue's opening page.



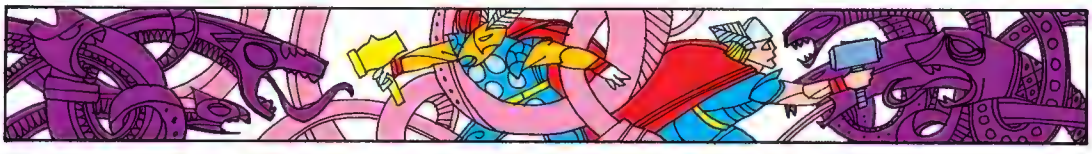
Thor #337

Thor #338

Thor #339

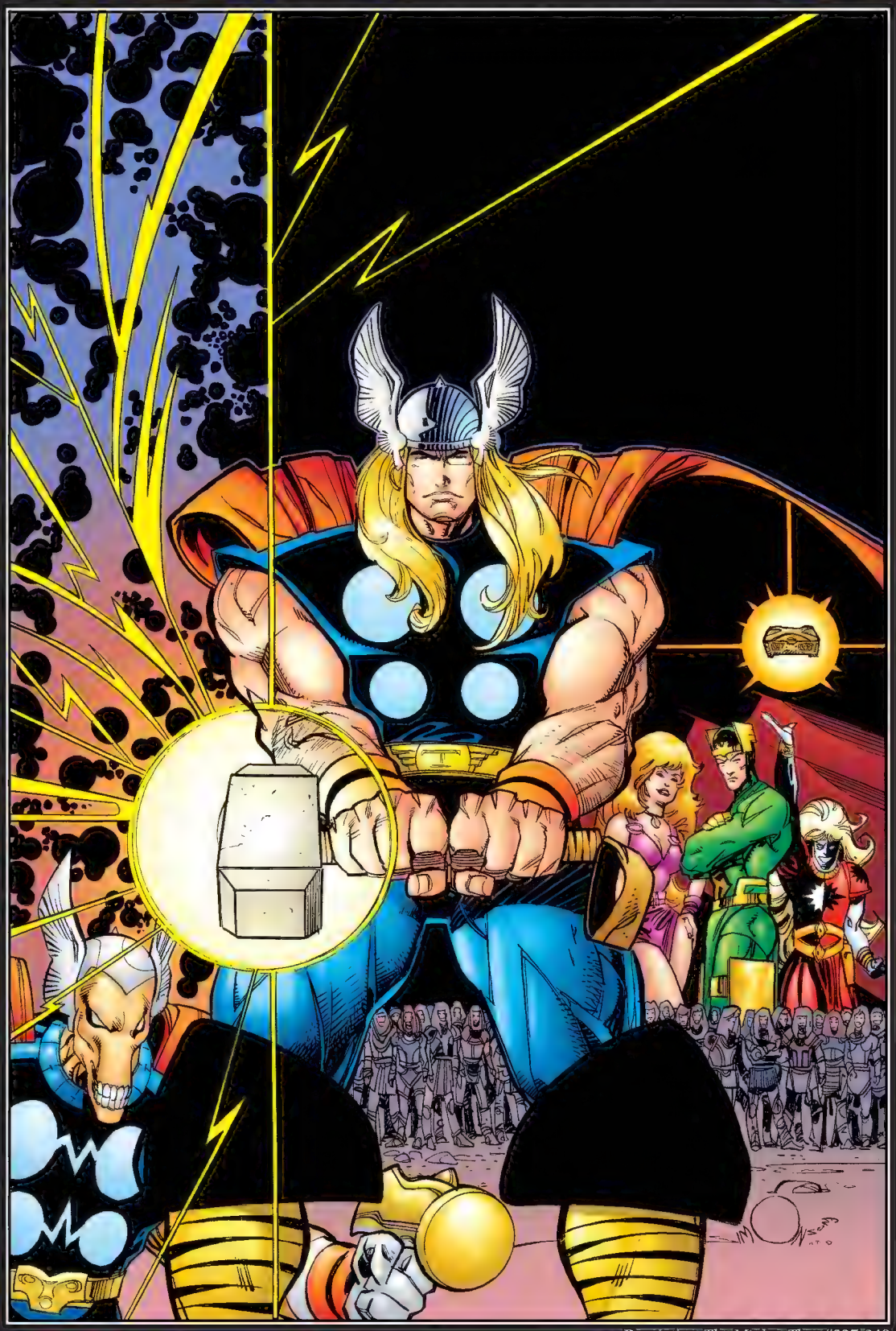


Thor #340



Simonson also illustrated a design element that ran underneath each cover in the collection.

Thor Visionaries: Walter Simonson TPB (2000) cover
by Walter Simonson & Steve Buccellato



Reprinting *The Mighty Thor* #337-348

Thor Visionaries: Walter Simonson Vol. 1 TPB Second Edition (2008) cover
by Walter Simonson & Matt Milla

Reprinting *The Mighty Thor* #337-348

INTRODUCTION

BY WALTER SIMONSON

FROM THOR VISIONARIES: WALTER SIMONSON (2000)

…For If the Odinsword Be Drawn!

I wrote that title in 1967 during the worst excesses of my efforts to imitate Stan Lee. Back then, I was a geology major in college, Vietnam was a looming shadow for every young man of draftable age in America and Marvel was publishing about eleven comics a month. Which meant that I was measuring strikes and dips on the rocks below the Holyoke Dam, thinking tough thoughts about my future after graduation and purchasing every comic Marvel published.

Thor was my personal favorite. I'd already had an abiding interest in Norse mythology when I discovered Marvel's version. And Stan and Jack were telling wonderful stories. Stories I read so many times, I can still remember them better than I can my own. Off the top of my head: the Trial of the Gods, Thor's evolving struggle against Loki, the Norn Stones and the Destroyer, the Absorbing Man, the coming of Hercules, the treachery of Seidring the Merciless (I did think Odin missed the boat there; would you trust an advisor on your staff named Seidring the Merciless?), the titanic battle against Pluto and the forces of the Netherworld, the ultimate fate (at least for the first time) of Jane Foster, and the introduction of Sif coinciding with the War against the Trolls and their hidden ally, Orikal. (I never got the "Oracle" reference there; I always thought the name sounded like some sort of decay-preventing dentifrice with an accent on the last syllable.)

Inspired by the comic, I wrote my own Thor story, an amalgam of Stan and Jack continuity sprinkled with a little Norse mythology, and overcooked in my heated imagination. The idea grew out of a pair of *Thor Annuals* Marvel published during the summers of the mid-'60s. Somewhere along the way, I thought of doing a BIG Thor story, so big that it couldn't be contained in a single comic, and I structured it out along the lines of Marvel's publishing schedule. My imagined story would come out in the summertime. It would begin in one of the regular monthly issues of Thor, run through all the other Marvel titles the same month (they only had about eleven titles then, remember?), and finish up the following month with a double-length flourish in a *Thor Annual*!

I cast the fire elemental Surtur as my principal villain. Stan and Jack had already introduced him into the Thor comic by then, but mostly he was just one more really large bad guy. I wanted to go back to the mythology and re-create something closer to the Surtur I found there. A great being of fire who, at the end of time during Ragnarok, flings fire across the Nine Worlds with his really big sword and burns almost everything to ashes. Including himself presumably.

And the Marvel Universe already had a really big sword.

In Tales of Asgard, a backup feature that ran in the early issues of Thor, Stan and Jack spun a story around the Odinsword (or Oversword as it was originally called). It was a huge blade fit for a giant that lay in a great sheath enshrined in the middle of Asgard. And it was said that if the sword were ever drawn, Ragnarok would fall.

Hooking the Odinsword up with Surtur didn't seem any great stretch given the prophecy. So I began building a story by assigning the sword an identity. I posited that it was Surtur's weapon, the very sword with which he was destined to end the Nine Worlds. Odin had at some point in the deeps of time carried the sword off to prevent Surtur from triggering Ragnarok prematurely. Over

the centuries, the actual origin of the sword had been forgotten and Odin's own name given to the blade. The prophecy was a faint echo of the sword's true nature. But of course, Odin remembered. As did Surtur.

My story began as Surtur magically retrieved his sword, calling it to his side and breaking the protective spells Odin had woven around it. But Surtur still had to set it alight in Asgard in order to bring about the final doom of the gods. And the way to Asgard led through Earth. Surtur's various minions would attack Earth throughout the Marvel Universe in the company's other titles, and finally, Surtur would attack Asgard directly, going up against Thor and then Odin himself in the final chapter, the *Annual*.

By the summer of 1969, I'd given up geology, failed my draft physical and entered art school. And I had begun to draw my imaginary Annual. I was about 30 pages of pencils and inks into it before I concluded that my inking wasn't up to snuff. So I put the project aside, thinking I would return to it when my inks had improved.

I got my chance fourteen years later. Editor Mark Gruenwald offered me the chance to write and draw *Thor* for Marvel. By then, the Odinsword was gone, destroyed in an earlier story. I decided not to try to resurrect it. There didn't seem much point by then. But forging a new weapon wasn't a big story problem and after all those years, I finally got the chance to tell my original story, enlarging its mythological framework, and even layering in a little blacksmithing, some science fiction and a bit of the Celtic fairy faith as well. I'd learned a few things since I'd imagined that original story.

There was an extra benefit from the gap between the story's conception and its execution. By the time I finally had the chance to do it, I'd given up trying to be either Stan Lee or Jack Kirby. Which meant among other things that I could abandon my original title for the saga. Until now. Just as well. I can't imagine what sentence that clause was supposed to be completing. And with luck, I'll never write a dangling phrase beginning with an ellipsis, a preposition and a conjunction again!

2000

INTRODUCTION

BY WALTER SIMONSON

FROM THOR BY WALTER SIMONSON OMNIBUS (2011)

The first Marvel comic I ever read was a well-thumbed copy of *Journey into Mystery #113*. It was lying on a chair in a friend's dorm room my freshman year in college. The issue was written by Stan Lee and penciled by Jack Kirby with inks by Chic Stone. It featured the tale of the mighty Thor's second go-round with his enemy, the Grey Gargoyle. I was caught by the rough, visceral art on the cover. The drawing exploded with energy, despite the fact that it was largely a picture of people standing around a doctor's office. It looked like no comic I'd ever seen before. And the interior art was just as rough, just as vital.

I had always loved the tales of the Norse myths, filled as they were with wild gods and tragic destinies. When I was a child, I discovered an 1895 edition of *Myths from Northern Lands* by H.A. Guerber on one of my parents' bookshelves. From that moment, I was hooked. Back then, there weren't a lot of books that related the Norse myths. But I read everything I could find, and loved it all. So it came as an extremely cool surprise to find a comic loosely based on one of the principal figures of the old stories. I tore through the tale, and remained untroubled by the differences I found between the original myths and this pop culture Thor. Blond hair, no beard, no Belt of Strength, no Iron Gloves and an ordinary handle on Mjolnir? Who cared? I wasn't looking for stories I had already read in books. I was discovering a new world!

I didn't see any more of that world for six months. In those days before local comic shops, comic books were mostly available in drug stores, five-and-dimes and mom-and-pop soda fountains that sported spinner racks. I quickly discovered that very few of them carried Marvel comics. But in the fall of 1965, I stumbled across the mother lode of Marvel titles in a drug store. *Journey into Mystery* #120 and #121 were sitting side by side on the rack at a Drug Fair in Greenbelt, MD, a five-mile bike ride from home. I devoured them…but didn't buy them.

Naturally, as a sophisticated and worldly-wise sophomore in college, purchasing comics was, after all, somewhat beneath me. Comics were for kids. However, after I'd ridden back to the Drug Fair four or five times to reread the comic books, I finally decided that the wisest course of action was to buy the damn things.

With that, I was off.

Stan and Jack were just at the beginning of what I regard, in retrospect, as their finest run on the title. They told stories I read so many times that I can still remember them better than I can my own. Off the top of my head—the Trial of the Gods, Thor's evolving struggle against Loki, the Norn Stones and the Destroyer, the Absorbing Man, the coming of Hercules, the treachery of Seidring the Merciless (I do think Odin missed the boat there; would you trust your life to somebody on your staff named Seidring the Merciless?), Thor's titanic battle against Pluto and the forces of the Netherworld, the ultimate fate (at least for the first time) of Jane Foster, and the introduction of Sif coinciding with the War against Ulik, the Trolls and their hidden ally, Orikal.

Reading comics didn't get any better than that.

That two-year run of Thor stories became the model for my own creative efforts on the title. Stan and Jack's inventiveness never flagged. New characters seemed to appear with practically every

issue, the pace of the stories never let up and Thor was in trouble most of the time. Perhaps the most powerful lesson I learned from those comics was that if you kept a straight face, you could do anything. The wildest stories were possible if you invited the readers to come along on the journey without breaking faith with them. No nudges in the ribs or sly winks to let them know that we were all in on the joke, that we were all too hip for our own good. The essence of a good story was to bind the reader with a spell broken only at the story's conclusion, and perhaps, not even then.

I was inspired as well by the original Norse myths. I tried to capture something of the range of those tales without simply going back and regurgitating them. I wanted to tell stories of epic scope; I wanted to tell stories of small scale with elements of humor in them; I wanted to tell stories of great deeds and dark treacheries, of misplaced loyalties and blasted hopes, seasoned with occasional unexpected laughter.

And of course, I mixed in my own interests as well. The story of Thor's magical transformation (I will say no more about that story here) was inspired in part by my love of the work of Carl Barks, the first comic book creator whose work I ever followed specifically, long before I knew his name.

I could not be more delighted to see these stories reprinted as a collection, remastered and recolored. I hope that they will please those readers already familiar with them, and perhaps find a new audience a quarter of a century after they were first told.

No project like this is the work of a single individual. The following is a lengthy, though by no means exhaustive, list of some of the folks I'd like to thank who helped make these stories and this book a reality, then and now:

Terry Austin, Mark Beazley, Sal Buscema, Dennis Calero, Mike Carlin, Howard Chaykin, Dan Didio, Mark Gruenwald, Steve Hoveke, Thomas Kintner, Jim Lee, Ralph Macchio, Howard Mackie, Frank Miller, Allen Milgrom, Steve Oliff and the entire Olyoptics crew, George Roussos, Christie (Max) Scheele, Jim Shooter, Louise Simonson, James Sokolowski, Bob Wiacek and John Workman.

So be it.

New York
January 2011

Thor by Walter Simonson Omnibus (April 2011) cover
by Walter Simonson & Steve Oliff

Reprinting *The Mighty Thor* #337-355, #357-369 & #371-382 and *Balder the Brave* #1-4

BIOGRAPHIES

WALTER SIMONSON

Walter Simonson mixed the power of Jack Kirby comics with an experimental European influence to produce a visual style that has made him one of his generation's foremost innovators.

After achieving acclaim for DC's "Manhunter" feature in *Detective Comics*, Simonson moved to Marvel's black-and-white magazine line where he illustrated an adaptation of Robert E. Howard's "The Hyborean Age" and penciled the first three issues of *Rampaging Hulk*. Next came a yearlong stint on *Thor* that would be far from his last encounter with the Asgardian hero. Simonson soon made a decisive shift to sci-fi. Adaptations of *Close Encounters of the Third Time* for Marvel and *Alien: The Illustrated Story* in *Heavy Metal* were followed by runs on *Battlestar Galactica*, which featured Simonson's first writing credits, and *Star Wars*. Simonson continued to develop his craft as a writer on Marvel's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* adaptation and *Marvel Graphic Novel* #6: *Star Slammers*, a concept revived from his art school days that he wrote, penciled and inked.

In 1982, Simonson teamed with writer Chris Claremont on the DC/Marvel crossover team-up of the X-Men and New Teen Titans. Shortly thereafter, he began his epochal run scripting and penciling *Thor*, the first issue of which introduced Beta Ray Bill and became one of the most highly acclaimed titles of the period. His collaboration with his wife, Louise, on *X-Factor* included the introduction of Archangel and Apocalypse. Later, the husband and wife team would write the *Havok & Wolverine: Meltdown* prestige miniseries.

In the early '90s, Simonson had a memorable run writing and drawing *Fantastic Four*. Other credits from this era included the *Iron Man: 2020* one-shot and *Avengers*. More recent work has included *Orion* at DC, *Elric: The Making of a Sorceror* with Michael Moorcock and *Avengers* and *Indestructible Hulk* for Marvel.

BOB BUDIANSKY

Throughout his career in comics, Bob Budiansky has proved himself as an artist, a writer, an editor and a concept designer. In the early '70s, the Bronx-born Budiansky attended State University of New York at Buffalo. While in college, he resumed his childhood love of reading comics and found inspiration in the works of John Buscema, Jack Kirby and Gil Kane. After graduating with a civil engineering degree, Budiansky decided to try comics for a career instead. He joined Marvel as an editorial assistant and production artist for Marvel's British reprint department. Over the next few years, Budiansky would leave to work as a freelance artist, then return to Marvel as an associate editor, then depart once more to draw. Budiansky settled into a rhythm as a cover artist and sometimes interior artist, with early credits including a Falcon story in *Captain America* #220. By 1980, he had moved almost fully into editing, with titles like *Avengers*, *Captain America* and *Ghost Rider* under his purview.

In 1982, Budiansky took on the full-time penciling duties of *Ghost Rider*, drawing the series until its final issue in 1984. He also co-plotted and penciled the four-issue miniseries *Prince Namor, the Sub-Mariner*, scripted by J.M. DeMatteis. Budiansky would be launched into legend with his next project: *The Transformers*. Known chiefly as an artist, the fledgling writer saw an opportunity to prove his writing skills with *The Transformers*, so on a tight deadline, Budiansky spent a long weekend utilizing a backstory written by Jim Shooter to create the names and personalities that would define the initial set of robot toys, including icons like Bumblebee and Megatron. Over the next five years, Budiansky guided the franchise's comic book and continued to develop names, character profiles and packaging copy for Hasbro. When the comic book and toy line dropped temporarily out of popularity, Budiansky turned to other things, overseeing the production of Marvel Comics trading cards and developing a character of his own to add to the Marvel lexicon, Sleepwalker. After editing titles through the late '90s at Marvel, including Spider-Man titles during the Clone Saga era, Budiansky left comics for Scholastic. In 2010, he was inaugurated by Hasbro into the Transformers Hall of Fame.

CHARLES VESS

Widely regarded as one of the best fantasy illustrators of his generation, Charles Vess also built up quite a reputation as a comic book artist during his ascent in the 1980s. Born in 1951 and raised in pastoral Virginia, which he described as a wooded wonderland that was formative in imbuing his work with a sensual and magical quality, Vess' first work was for the sci-fi/fantasy magazine *Heavy Metal*. A few years later, he began a relationship with Marvel, contributing several fairy-tale stories in *Epic Illustrated*. Though fantasy art was Vess' strong suit—he penciled a "Tales of Asgard" story for *Marvel Fanfare*, illustrated an Asgard-based graphic novel *The Raven Banner* and penciled or inked various issues of *Kull the Conqueror* and *Conan the Barbarian*—he also dabbled in super hero comics, where his highly illustrative linework stood out on the racks. His now-iconic covers to *Web of Spider-Man* #1 and *Amazing Spider-Man* #261 were fan-favorites, and he scripted and illustrated a backup story, "Cry of the Wendigo," in *Amazing Spider-Man* #277. His high-profile work with Marvel culminated in the 1990 graphic novel *Spider-Man: Spirits of the Earth*, which he wrote and illustrated, and the 1991 movie adaptation of *Hook*. Vess was a natural fit with the burgeoning Vertigo imprint at DC, and paired with writer Neil Gaiman on *Sandman* and *Books of Magic*. Also with Gaiman, Vess illustrated the prose novel *Stardust* and the children's book *Blueberry Girl*. Outside of comics, Vess provided illustrations to George R. R. Martin's Game of Thrones novel *A Storm of Swords* and *The Books of Earthsea*, a collection of Ursula K. Le Guin's writings.

ALAN ZELENETZ

Alan Zelenetz enjoyed a prolific career writing at Marvel in the 1980s. He wrote issues of *Moon Knight*, *Avengers* and *Master of Kung Fu,* but most of his work was outside of super heroes in the sci-fi and fantasy genre. His tales of the son of Odin appeared *Bizarre Adventures*, a quartet of Annuals, a run of stories featuring the Warriors Three in *Marvel Fanfare* and an eight-issue run on *Thor*. He also wrote several stories in *The Savage Sword of Conan*, nearly the full run of the 1983 *Kull the Conqueror* series, multiple issues of *King Conan/Conan the King* and the 1989 graphic novel *Kull: The Vale of Shadow*. Zelenetz paired the Asgardian hero Thor with the Hyborian Age's Conan in an iconic team-up in *What If?* #39, "What If Thor of Asgard Had Met Conan the Barbarian?" He also helped spearhead the exhaustive *The Official Handbook of the Conan Universe*. In 1984, Zelenetz collaborated with writer Carl Potts and artist Frank Cirocco on *The Alien Legion*, a sci-fi series that was published under Marvel's Epic imprint. The writer wrote the entire twenty-issue run of the first series, as well as the 1987 graphic novel *The Alien Legion: A Grey Day to Die*. Zelenetz's last credit in comics was as author of the 1990 Epic graphic novel *Jhereg*. He left comics to become an educator and administrator, and in 2003 started the film production company Ovie Entertainment.

Biographies researched and written by John Rhett Thomas

MARVEL MASTERWORKS

THE MARVEL MASTERWORKS LIBRARY PRESENTS THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC BOOKS, PAINSTAKINGLY RESTORED FROM THE HIGHEST-QUALITY SOURCES AND WITH THE MOST DILIGENT ARCHIVAL METHODS.

THE GOLDEN AGE

As the Great Depression wore on and the specter of war hung over America, a new storytelling medium was born: the comic book. Within their four-color pages, larger-than-life super heroes could make short work of America's foes, giving readers of all ages hope for victory against the real-life enemies that faced the United States. At the forefront of this new medium was Timely Comics, a young company staffed by such legendary creators as Carl Burgos, Bill Everett, Joe Simon, Jack Kirby and Stan Lee.

GOLDEN AGE ALL-WINNERS VOLS. 1-4
GOLDEN AGE CAPTAIN AMERICA VOLS. 1-6
GOLDEN AGE DARING MYSTERY VOLS. 1-2
GOLDEN AGE HUMAN TORCH VOLS. 1-3
GOLDEN AGE MARVEL COMICS VOLS. 1-7
GOLDEN AGE MYSTIC COMICS VOL. 1
GOLDEN AGE SUB-MARINER VOLS. 1-3
GOLDEN AGE U.S.A. COMICS VOLS. 1-2
GOLDEN AGE YOUNG ALLIES VOLS. 1-2

THE ATLAS ERA

Seeing super heroes waning, Timely Comics evolved into Atlas Comics and took on a vast new range of genres: science-fiction tales of outer space adventures; realistic war comics; buxom jungle heroines; horror comics that would become the center of a moral panic that rocked the industry; and romance comics for the emerging teen audience. Even the classic costumed heroes of the Golden Age retooled to take on the threat of Communism. From Western gunfighters to crime to horror, the Atlas Era had it all!

ATLAS ERA BATTLEFIELD VOL. 1
ATLAS ERA BLACK KNIGHT/YELLOW CLAW VOL. 1
ATLAS ERA HEROES VOLS. 1-3
ATLAS ERA JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY VOLS. 1-4
ATLAS ERA JUNGLE ADVENTURE VOLS. 1-3
ATLAS ERA MENACE VOL. 1
ATLAS ERA STRANGE TALES VOLS. 1-6
ATLAS ERA TALES TO ASTONISH VOLS. 1-4
ATLAS ERA TALES OF SUSPENSE VOLS. 1-4
ATLAS ERA VENUS VOL. 1

THE MARVEL AGE

In August 1961, change hit newsstands: *The Fantastic Four* #1 did not feature the squeaky-clean heroes of yesteryear. They were real characters placed in extraordinary circumstances. They lived together, they fought among themselves — and sometimes, they even lost to the bad guys. This was more than a change in attitude: It was the beginning of something entirely different — the beginning of the Marvel Age of Comics!

Thanks to the fertile imaginations of Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko and others, an unending list of heroes followed the FF with ever-increasing acclaim and popularity: the Amazing Spider-Man, the Mighty Thor, the Incredible Hulk, Daredevil, Iron Man and the X-Men, to name but a few. These were the Marvel heroes, born of conflict and a continuous struggle to balance human lives with superhuman responsibilities.

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KAMIC RIDER
MARIKA